

A MATTHAY
Miscellany

Rare and unissued
recordings by Tobias
Matthay and his pupils

apr

Tobias Matthay Columbia DX 444; matrices CAX 6582-1/83-1; recorded on 16 November 1932

MATTHAY **Studies in the form of a Suite** Op 16

1. No 1 Prelude (2.09)
2. No 8 Bravura (2.11)

MATTHAY **On Surrey Hills** Op 30

3. No 1 Twilight Hills (1.34)
4. No 4 Wind-Sprites (1.56)

Irene Scharrer

SCHUMANN **Piano Sonata No 2 in G minor** Op 22 HMV (previously unissued)

5. I So rasch wie möglich matrices Ce 4295-1 and 4302-2; recorded on 4 March 1924 (4.47)
6. III Scherzo: Sehr rasch und markiert (1.33)
7. IV Rondo: Presto (beginning) (2.14)

8. CHOPIN **Prelude No 23 in F major** Op 28 HMV (previously unissued); matrix Ce 7096-3 [part] (0.54)
recorded on 28 October 1925

9. SCHUBERT **Impromptu in A flat major** Op 90 No 4 (D899) Columbia (previously unissued) (5.50)
matrices WA 10248-2 and 10249; recorded on 12 May 1930

Raie Da Costa

10. VERDI/LISZT **Rigoletto de Verdi – Paraphrase de Concert** S434 HMV C 1967 (6.37)
matrices Ce 19809-1 and 19810-2; recorded on 13 June 1930

11. J STRAUSS II/GRÜNFELD **Soirée de Vienne** Op 56 HMV B 3500; matrices Bb 19811-2 and 19812-1 (5.20)
recorded on 13 June 1930

Ethel Bartlett

12. BACH/RUMMEL **Beloved Jesus, we are here** BWV731 NGS 152; matrix WAX5311-1 (3.30)
recorded on 23 December 1929

Denise Lassimonne

- BACH **Two-Part Inventions** BWV772–786 Decca (previously unissued); matrices AR 6286–89
13. Invention No 1 in C major BWV772 recorded on 23 September 1941 (1.03)
14. Invention No 2 in C minor BWV773 (1.33)
15. Invention No 3 in D major BWV774 (0.56)
16. Invention No 4 in D minor BWV775 (0.49)
17. Invention No 5 in E flat major BWV776 (1.20)
18. Invention No 6 in E major BWV777 (1.46)
19. Invention No 7 in E minor BWV778 (1.02)
20. Invention No 8 in F major BWV779 (0.45)
21. Invention No 9 in F minor BWV780 (1.21)
22. Invention No 10 in G major BWV781 (0.44)
23. Invention No 11 in G minor BWV782 (1.38)
24. Invention No 12 in A major BWV783 (1.12)
25. Invention No 13 in A minor BWV784 (1.09)
26. Invention No 14 in B flat major BWV785 (1.17)
27. Invention No 15 in B minor BWV786 (1.10)
28. MOZART **Prelude and Fugue in C major** K394 (K383a) Decca K 1008; matrices AR 5879 and 5880
recorded on 13 June 1941 (8.24)

Ernest Lush

29. GRIEG **Halling** No 4 of Norwegian peasant dances, Op 72 ... HMS 101; matrix ZEA18497; recorded on 25 October 1955 (3.02)

Adolph Hallis

- DEBUSSY **Douze Études** Decca K 895; matrices DTA 3537 and 3538; recorded on 3–5 February 1938
30. No 9 Pour les notes répétées (3.00)
31. No 10 Pour les sonorités opposées (3.56)

Harriet Cohen

32. TURINA **Danza de la seducción** No 2 of Danses gitanes, Op 55 British Forces Broadcasting Service
matrix 2EN14215; recorded on 16 July 1945 (2.35)

Eunice Norton

33. HONEGGER **Concertino for piano and orchestra** Victor 8765; matrices CVE 87583-1/84-1 (8.58)
MINNEAPOLIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA / EUGENE ORMANDY recorded on 15 January 1935

Nina Milkina

34. SCARLATTI **Sonata in G major** Kk125 (L487) Westminster XWN 18697 (2.28)
35. SCARLATTI **Sonata in A major** Kk208 (L238) matrices XTV 26175 and 26176; issued in June 1958 (3.26)
36. SCARLATTI **Sonata in D minor** Kk396 (L110) (3.50)
37. SCARLATTI **Sonata in D major** Kk29 (L461) (5.27)

Bruce Simonds

38. SCHUBERT **Impromptu in B flat major** Op 142 No 3 (D935) ... Carillon Records (unnumbered private issue) (9.30)
matrices P4RM 9200 and 9201; recorded in the 1950s

Ray Lev

39. SCHUMANN **Novellette in F sharp minor** Op 21 No 8 Concert Hall CHS-1102; matrix XTV 14800; issued in 1952 (9.46)

Egerton Tidmarsh

40. BACH **Preambulum** from Partita No 5 in G major, BWV829 AFMC 2043; matrix 03398 (2.10)
recorded in July/August 1923
41. MOSCHELES **Etude in E major** Op 70 No 4 AFMC 2044; matrix 03399; recorded in July/August 1923 (2.20)

Desirée MacEwan

42. BRAHMS **Waltz in A flat major** Op 39 No 15 AFMC 2021; matrix 03165; recorded in March 1923 (1.43)
43. BACH **Gigue in G minor** from English Suite No 3, BWV808 ... AFMC 2021; matrix 03165; recorded in March 1923 (1.17)

NOTE: The accurate dating of the AFMC series of recordings has proved particularly elusive. There are no known primary records and so dates have been deduced from matrix number sequences, reviews and other such material. This gives us a fairly accurate picture for the Aeolian-produced discs but unfortunately there is still a wide margin for error in the later Parlophone-produced ones.

Rae Robertson

44. PURCELL **Prelude in C major** from Suite V, Z666 AFMC 2060; matrix 7033; recorded in 1925 (0.58)
45. HAYDN **Allegro con brio** from Sonata in D major, Hob XVI:37 AFMC 2060; matrix 7033; recorded in 1925 (2.48)
46. JENSEN **Sehnsucht** No 5 of Romantische Studien, Op 8 AFMC 2060; matrix 7032; recorded in 1925 (2.07)

Dorothy Howell

47. HANDEL **Courante** from Suite No 4 in E minor, HWV429 AFMC 2072; matrix 7057; recorded in 1925 (1.07)
48. BUCK **Prelude in C minor 'Marnic'** AFMC 2072; matrix 7056; recorded in 1925 (2.07)
49. HELLER **Prelude in C sharp minor** Op 81 No 10 AFMC 2072; matrix 7056; recorded in 1925 (1.27)

Margaret Portch

50. HELLER **Study in C minor** Op 46 No 5 (abridged) AFMC 2033; matrix 03370; recorded in July/August 1923 (0.52)
51. BREWER **The lonely stranger** No 2 of Three sketches AFMC 2033; matrix 03370; recorded in July/August 1923 (2.10)

Hilda Dederich

52. MOZART **Fantaisie in D minor** K397 AFMC 2066; matrix 7045; recorded in 1925 (3.54)
53. BORODIN **Au couvent** No 1 of Petite suite AFMC 2041; matrix 03386; recorded in July/August 1923 (2.56)
54. SCHUMANN **Glückes genug** No 5 of Kinderszenen, Op 15 AFMC 2066; matrix 7046; recorded in 1925 (0.49)
55. SWINSTEAD **Valse gracieuse** No 4 of Fancy Free AFMC 2066; matrix 7046; recorded in 1925 (1.31)

Tobias Matthay

56. MATTHAY **Prelude** No 1 of Studies in the form of a Suite, Op 16 AFMC 2022; matrix 03222; recorded in April 1923 (2.18)
57. MATTHAY **Six Monothemes** Op 13 No 5 AFMC 2022; matrix 03222; recorded in April 1923 (1.22)
58. MATTHAY **Six Monothemes** Op 13 No 6 AFMC 2022; matrix 03223; recorded in April 1923 (2.33)

IN JANUARY OF 1925, critic Herbert Biss wondered why the tone quality of so many pianists on recordings seemed unpleasantly harsh. Writing in *The Gramophone*, he asked whether the performers themselves were to blame, or whether factors such as the choice of instrument, studio, or equipment were more influential.¹ Suspecting the fault rested primarily with the pianists, he put the question to the eminent teacher Tobias Matthay (1858–1945), and received an unqualified response: ‘When I suggested to him that the pianists were largely to blame, he was in entire agreement.’²

To anyone who knew Matthay’s teaching, his reaction was scarcely surprising, for he had spent his entire career (by then in its sixth decade) cultivating gradations in tonal quality, so much so that his pupils – as historian Jacques Barzun once wrote – could be spotted ‘even in a dark room by the sound they make’.³

Born in Clapham to German immigrants, Matthay entered the Royal Academy of Music at thirteen, though his piano studies with William Dorrell, and later Walter Macfarren did little to inspire him. However, the two years he spent studying composition with William



TOBIAS MATTHAY (back row, centre) with his pupils and other RAM staff circa 1914
MYRA HESS, IRENE SCHARRER & HARRIET COHEN are seated front row 5th, 6th and 7th from the left

Sterndale Bennett, followed by another three with Arthur Sullivan, played a decisive role in shaping his aspirations. Thus he was actually disappointed in the spring of 1880 when the RAM offered him only a piano professorship, for he longed to teach composition.⁴ For the first decade of his career his students were often unimpressive, for most were studying piano purely as a secondary instrument to support broader musical goals, but in April of 1886, he heard the century's greatest composer/pianist, Franz Liszt – then in the last four months of his life – and he experienced a pianistic epiphany. And about six weeks later, when he heard Anton Rubinstein give a series of recitals, his view of the piano was permanently transformed, for he now saw the instrument as a fountain of inexhaustible colour – in fact, in the hands of Liszt or Rubinstein it became a veritable orchestra. Two years later, when Hans von Bülow performed a Beethoven cycle in London, Matthay was so overwhelmed that, in essence, he redefined his life's purpose, vowing to discover the underlying scientific causes that enabled these artists to transcend the piano's supposed limitations.

In 1903, after over a decade of observation, analysis and experimentation, he published *The Art of Touch*, an encyclopaedic volume that influenced piano pedagogy throughout the English-speaking world. So many students were soon in quest of his insights that two years later he opened the Tobias Matthay Pianoforte School, first on Oxford Street, then in 1909 relocating to Wimpole Street, where it remained for the next thirty years (though he also continued to teach at the RAM until 1925).

When the TMPS first appeared, Matthay's pupils were already receiving acclaim throughout Britain, and the achievements of York Bowen, Irene Scharrer, Myra Hess, Harriet Cohen and many others were soon to be heralded throughout the world. Matthay lived in an era when piano theoreticians wrote copiously, and although his commitment to scientific validation was not unique, he stood alone in advocating the principle that technique and interpretation were inseparable. How ever dense some may have found his explanations concerning the often controversial subjects of 'weight' and 'relaxation', they were never meant as ends in themselves, but always linked to the achievement of musical effects, and he analyzed a musical score as diligently as he studied the physiological details which made its realization possible. By the end of the decade, many spoke of a Matthay 'insignia', for his students were known by their ease of execution, an extraordinary musical imagination and sensitivity, and – of course – beauty of sound. Some, like Bowen and Scharrer, were noted for their effortless virtuosity, while others, like Cohen, made their reputations interpreting Bach and the moderns, but nearly all were acclaimed for their musicality as much as for their technical mastery.

The AFMC series of recordings

Matthay was in his late fifties when World War I engulfed Europe, and it seriously hampered the mission of the TMPS, since many of his teachers were soon called away to the front. In addition, because of his German lineage and his long-time support for the Bechstein piano firm, he was placed under suspicion by a



DESIRÉE MacEWAN

government that was growing increasingly paranoiac. One evening, two MI5 agents even descended on his Sussex country home, which stood some 700 feet above sea level, to allay their fears that he was not operating a signalling tower to assist German air raids.⁵ Though his patriotism was quickly reaffirmed, Matthay took a number of steps to underscore his loyalties, including allying himself in 1916 with the Scottish-born John McEwen – his

former pupil and now an RAM professor – to found the Anglo-French Music Company. A publishing house committed to advancing the works of younger British composers, the AFMC also specialized in serving the pedagogical market, issuing piano works of graduated difficulty which were occasionally adopted for examination purposes by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. At the War's end, when the commercial recording industry began to expand, the AFMC made the decision to record a few of these works, along with more standard repertoire from the ABRSM syllabus, in the hope that younger students might benefit from hearing artistic performances.

Though at least seventy-nine different titles were sold between 1923 and around 1926, few commercial releases are as difficult to locate today as AFMC recordings. Most were ten-inch size, but a few were twelve-inch, including Matthay's recording of some of his own pieces, released in July of 1923. By then, the company's corporate offices had been moved to the ground floor of the TMPS annexe at 95 Wimpole Street. McEwen and several others associated with the firm also had financial ties to the Aeolian Corporation, and for the first two years the discs were recorded at Aeolian Hall on New Bond Street and pressed by its subsidiary, the Universal Music Company at Hayes, Middlesex.⁷ By the standards of the day, the technology employed was state-of-the-art, and *The Gramophone's* Herbert Biss was elated, insisting: 'All of the records in their list are as perfect as I ever heard records.'⁶ Sold through record shops, they were priced at three shillings and six pence for 10" discs and five shillings for the 12"

size, but scholar and researcher Nicholas Morgan speculates that their limited pressings may indicate that the overall sales were unimpressive.⁸

All but one of the pianists who recorded for AFMC were Matthay pupils (the exception being Alec Rowley), and most were teaching at the TMPS by the early 1920s. The first twenty-one discs to be issued were recorded by **Desirée MacEwan** (1902–1990), including the two selections heard here which were released as the A and B sides of a 10" recording in March of 1923. Like Matthay, MacEwan was born in Clapham, and she entered the RAM at the age of fourteen. Matthay always thought highly of her and appointed her to the staff of the TMPS before she had even graduated from the Academy. He was particularly impressed with her ideas concerning children's pedagogy, and it may be no coincidence that he engaged her for so many AFMC recordings. Although the surviving disc from which these tracks were taken did not preserve all the resonance that might be desired, her reading of the familiar Brahms A flat major Waltz shows a sensitivity to melodic inflection, and her Gigue from the third English Suite demonstrates extreme clarity and individualization of voices – traits on which Matthay insisted.

Frank Egerton 'Bob' Tidmarsh (1898–1979) was another native Londoner, and he began studying as a child at the TMPS, where his first teacher was Matthay's sister, Dora. He entered the RAM at fourteen and, due to a three-year hiatus while on active duty, he graduated in 1921 at the age of twenty-three. A formidable pianist, Tidmarsh later joined the RAM faculty, serving for many years alongside



Photo: Kenneth Norton Collins EGERTON TIDMARSH

Matthay's pupil Vivian Langrish, with whom he often performed two-piano programmes. The selections heard here, which were released in October 1923, show him off to fine advantage in two Advanced Grade works from the ABRSM syllabus. Demonstrating a remarkable clarity and vivacity in the opening of Bach's fifth Partita, his arpeggios in the Moscheles Etude are also rendered precisely as the composer instructed, 'avec délicatesse et élégance'.

Margaret Portch (1894–1974) was born in Hampstead, and after studies in Nuremburg entered the RAM when she was seventeen. Her first teacher at the TMPS had been pianist and composer Cuthbert Whitmore, and she quickly rose to prominence by effortlessly dispatching such demanding works as Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*. She travelled to the USA in the 1920s and spent much of the 1930s in South America, but relocated to Edinburgh during the War, where for thirty years she gave the occasional recital and remained a well-known piano teacher under her married name Margaret Vanderhorst. She could no doubt have achieved greater fame, but the two miniatures included here, recorded in 1923, give at least a sense of her mastery. Her abridged Heller Study is a miracle of control and melodic direction, and she rescues Herbert Brewer's brief Sketch from excessive sentimentality by transforming it into a mosaic of sensual colour.

Born in Birmingham, **Dorothy Howell** (1898–1982) entered the RAM at fifteen, where she studied piano with Matthay and composition with McEwen. Though remembered today primarily as a composer, she was a superb pianist, as the three selections included here amply demonstrate. Though one might wish she had added some ornamentation to her Handel Courante (she may have been cautioned against this so as not to conflict with the ABRSM recommended edition), in her hands Heller's brief Prelude becomes an elegant fantasy, and Percy Buck's moving tribute to his daughter-in-law, Mary Nicols ('Marnic' as he called her), is structured with impeccable attention to orchestral-like colour.



DOROTHY HOWELL

Hilda Dederich (1901–1969) also composed, but she achieved far greater fame as a pianist and teacher. As a child, she entered the TMPS as a pupil of McEwen's wife, Hedwig, and years later she became so close to Matthay's family that she even lived at his country home during World War II. She taught for years at the TMPS, also serving as one of its Directors, and after the War she became an esteemed professor at the RAM. Her exquisite rendition of Borodin's *Au couvent*, almost

overpowers through the richness of its lustrous sonorities. Her elegant Mozart Fantasia, while equally impressive, was recorded under entirely different circumstances, since in late 1924 the AFMC recording facilities were moved to the Parlophone studios near the intersection of Carlton Hill and Abbey Road, and Parlophone also assumed responsibilities for the discs' pressings.⁹ Her Mozart was released on a 12" disc joined by three other selections, two of which are included here. Her rendering of a



HILDA DEDERICH



RAE ROBERTSON

waltz by Felix Swinstead (1880–1959), another well-known Matthay pupil, sparkles with charm, while her *Kinderszenen* selection is graced by a wondrous cantabile.

The AFMC roster also included Matthay artists who recorded prolifically, such as York Bowen (see APR6007) and the Scottish-born **Rae Robertson** (1893–1956). Though clearly an accomplished virtuoso, Robertson is remembered today almost exclusively for his two-piano work with his wife, Ethel Bartlett,



ETHEL BARTLETT

and he left scarcely any solo recordings. Thus the selections included here, set down at the Parlophone studios, most likely sometime in 1925, offer special interest. His Purcell Prelude shows a marvellous grace and clarity, and his Haydn movement reveals a finesse that approaches wizardry, though arguably the tempo is too brisk, perhaps because both of these pieces had to be accommodated on the A side of a 12" disc. The B side also contained two works, only one of which is presented here: Adolf Jensen's *Sehnsucht*, his loving tribute to

his wife (which is rendered here in slightly abridged form), displays moments of exquisite sensitivity.

The Robertsons' earliest two-piano recordings were released by the National Gramophonic Society (see APR6012), but **Ethel Bartlett** (1896–1978) also recorded some solo works for the NGS, including Walter Rummel's transcription (or to use his term, 'adaptation') of the Bach organ Prelude BWV731, *Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier*, which was published in London by J & W Chester in 1927. Rummel, a highly skilled pianist, was a close friend of many in the Matthay circle, including Harriet Cohen, who often included his works in her own recitals. By December of 1929, Columbia was producing all NGS discs, and Ethel's recording was made at their spacious Petty France studios in London. Her rendering is wrought with delicacy in every voice, and in her hands Rummel's adaptation becomes so deeply moving that perennial questions concerning stylistic authenticity seem to lose all importance. **Ernest Lush** (1908–1988) also left few solo recordings, though his decades of service at the BBC gained him recognition as one of Britain's finest collaborative pianists. He gave his first broadcast at the age of fifteen, but continued to study at the TMPs for many years thereafter, even winning the School's Bronze Medal in 1932. His little-known rendition of a Grieg folk dance, recorded in October 1955, abounds with passion and subtlety. It was recorded for inclusion in HMV's popular series, *The History of Music in Sound* – released on the RCA label in America – which once supported the curricula of music schools throughout the world.



ERNEST LUSH

Resurrected treasures

This collection also makes numerous recordings available for the first time that were withheld from commercial release; indeed, so far as is known, the companies involved did not even retain the master discs. The earliest treasure from this group is a 1924 (partial) performance of Schumann's G minor Sonata for HMV by **Irene Scharrer** (1888–1971). Scharrer, whose virtuosity often evoked comparisons to Liszt, was the first of Matthay's students to record, setting down a version of Chopin's 'Black Key' *Étude* for The Gramophone Company as early as 1909, and remaining with the company (soon to be renamed HMV) for over two decades. The reasons the Schumann was not released are unknown, but all the Scharrer recordings in this set have been taken from pressings now in the possession of her descendants, including a

version of the Sonata's riveting first movement and another of its frenetic Scherzo, both done in their entirety. Sadly, her recording of the lyrical second movement did not survive, and only the first half of the Presto finale remains. Consonant with the practice of the day, Scharrer ends it at bar 134 with a dominant-tonic cadence to signal to the listener that the work continued on the opposite side, an intrusion that would normally be edited out in modern transfers joining the separate sections. Allowing for an occasional missed note, her playing is nothing short of miraculous, and



IRENE SCHARRER

although most of Scharrer's impressive legacy was surveyed in an earlier volume in this series (APR6010), the Sonata's first movement must also rank as one of her recorded masterpieces. Observing Schumann's 'So rasch wie möglich' ('As fast as possible') tempo marking to the letter, she engages the listener in an emotional thrill ride as she unfolds a carefully structured narrative of immense power.

A possible explanation for HMV's decision to withhold the Schumann may relate to their concern that the up-and-coming microphone technology, imminent by 1924, might have invoked unfavourable comparisons with the acoustic system then in use. Scharrer's first known 'electric' session for HMV was on 28 October 1925, when she recorded two Chopin Preludes, the F sharp minor and the F major; these were never released and they survive today only as a single 12" pressing in the possession of her family. The F sharp minor had previously been recorded in an acoustic version in 1921 (included on APR6010) and perhaps the later recording remained unreleased because the company felt it did not represent a significant improvement over this, but the F major, which had not been previously recorded, is a breathtaking gem, so it seems more likely that technical or commercial considerations determined its fate.¹⁰ Columbia's reasons for withholding her incomparable 1930 electrical recording of Schubert's A flat major Impromptu, D899 No 4, are also unknown, but today's listeners may be especially grateful that her family has retained possession of two complete takes of this work.

But of all Matthey-related 'buried treasures', perhaps the most fascinating is



DENISE LASSIMONNE IN 1928

Decca's set of the complete Bach Two-Part Inventions, recorded by his ward, **Denise Lassimonne** (1903–1994), at the company's West Hampstead studios on 23 September 1941. Even if Decca felt the recordings somewhat deficient in technical quality, it seems improbable they were rejected on aesthetic grounds, for her playing is so polished and refined that they arguably stand comparison with the finest Bach interpretations on disc – even today. The exact circumstances may never be known, but wartime exigencies may have played a role, since shellac was soon in short supply, and the company had begun to authorize releases requiring two or more 12" discs with greater discretion.¹¹ Fortunately in the summer of 1984, three of her American students carefully carried the fragile test records in her possession back to the States where a high-quality tape was made. This is now housed at the International Piano Archives at the University of Maryland, which made it available for these transfers. Because

the playing is so uniformly masterful, it would serve little purpose to cite specific passages in any of the fifteen Inventions, but connoisseurs may be especially fascinated by the revelations she brings forth in the oft-hackneyed F major (No 8), the A major (No 12), and the B flat major (No 14). As Matthay insisted, her passage work is always melodic and inflected, her colour palette is rich (and fortunately well captured), and her dynamic control is often breathtaking. The daughter of the French tutor to the Royal Family, Denise was born in Cowes on the Isle of Wight, and she began studying with Matthay as a child, entering the RAM at the age of thirteen and joining the TMPS staff while still a teenager. When her father died a few weeks short of her eighteenth birthday, her mother and her elder sister returned to France, allowing Matthay and his wife, who had no children of their own, to take her in. To them she became, in effect, an adopted daughter, and she

remained in Matthay's household until his death in December 1945. Some years earlier the Matthays had shown a similar generosity to Myra Hess, and though Myra was thirteen years older than Denise the two women enjoyed a sister-like camaraderie for most of their lives.¹²

Fortunately, the War did not impede Decca's release of Mozart's Prelude (Matthay always termed it a 'Fantasia') and Fugue, which Denise recorded about three months earlier than the Inventions, and which also deserves inclusion here. If the Prelude is, by modern interpretive standards, somewhat overly Romantic in scale, the Fugue is a marvel. Her playing exudes a joyous vivacity, filled with fluid, liquid legatos, all of which are achieved without benefit of pedal. The Mozart was released several months after she had recorded the Bach, and *The Musical Times* was highly complimentary, praising her performance as 'skilful and intelligent'.¹³ Obviously, the War brought untold hardships, but it also occasionally created unexpected opportunities. Not surprisingly, Denise frequently performed in the National Gallery concerts organized by Dame Myra Hess, who often engaged many Matthay students – including **Harriet Cohen** (1895–1967). Though Cohen's solo releases were commemorated in a previous instalment in this series (APR7304), she never recorded Turina's *Danza de la seducción*, so her broadcast for the British Forces Broadcasting Service – heard shortly after VE Day – holds special interest. Aside from some routine tempo markings, there is nothing in Turina's score, cast in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, to suggest the rhythmic freedom that Cohen



DENISE LASSIMONNE
& MYRA HESS IN 1937



HARRIET COHEN



ADOLPH HALLIS & PUPIL

imparts. But consonant with Matthay's teachings, she moulds and shapes her passages across the bar lines, simulating enticing flamenco effects that alternate with an unrestrained lyricism.

Beyond Britain: Matthay's expanding influence

After World War I, enrolment at the Tobias Matthay Pianoforte School began to increase, and by 1925 it had grown to an excess of 400 students. Although a majority still came from Britain, Matthay was now attracting increasing numbers from Commonwealth countries and the USA, as well as Europe and South America. By the mid-1920s, two of his South African students were gaining significant recognition both in London and internationally, though their professional paths were very different. **Adolph Hallis** (1896–1987) arrived at the RAM from his native Port Elizabeth in 1912 and studied with Matthay's colleague Oscar

Beringer. Forced home by the War in 1915, by the early twenties he had returned to study with Matthay, and as early as 1923, he was teaching at the TMPS. Hallis always nurtured a penchant for the new and the modern, and in the early 1930s he even composed scores for two of Hitchcock's earliest sound films.¹⁴ A few years later, he inaugurated London's groundbreaking Adolph Hallis Chamber Music Concerts, monthly offerings designed to promote 'forgotten works of the past', as well as 'new works of the immediate present'.¹⁵ Always intent on presenting less-explored repertoire, Hallis was both artistic director and frequent performer, and a single concert might conjoin the works of composers as disparate as Haydn, Schoenberg and Busoni. At the April 1937 concert, a Beethoven String Trio was heard before Hallis performed the second book of Debussy *Études* with 'remarkable virtuosity and a nice sense of colour'.¹⁶ About ten months later, he recorded all twelve *Études* at Decca's Thames Street studios, and they were released in November 1938, the first complete set committed to disc. Two from the second book are included here. The repeated-note study, in addition to presenting the obvious challenges of rapidly repeating a single key, allows Hallis to demonstrate a remarkable ability for creating florid legato effects against detached staccato passages without relying on the damper pedal – a skill that Matthay stressed. And Debussy's wonderfully sophisticated 'opposed sonorities' study provides him with an opportunity to explore his sensitivity to a newer harmonic language – one that foretells the vocabulary of Stravinsky and the Second Viennese School.

Another 'modern' artist who chose an unconventional path was **Raie Da Costa** (1905–1934), who left Cape Town at the age of nineteen for study at the TMPS. Matthey soon recognized her as a major talent, and for several years she excelled as an interpreter of Chopin and Liszt. However, by 1927 she was appearing regularly on the BBC as a 'syncopated pianist', a term more meaningful to British than American audiences and which covered a wide berth of pop styles. Within three years, Da Costa was internationally famous for her improvised stylizations of songs by Gershwin, Porter, Kern and others, eventually recording over 100 sides for Parlophone and HMV, whose ranks she joined in 1930. For sheer technical finesse, she had few peers among pop performers, and some of her recordings even offer flourishes rivalling the young Art Tatum. She was soon in constant demand but she never forgot her roots: even though her schedule was packed she occasionally found time to revisit the concert repertoire she most loved. Among her recorded output, the two HMV selections included here are exceptional rarities. Ironically, HMV signed Da Costa soon after Irene Scharrer had left that label late in 1929 for Columbia, for whom she recorded the Liszt *Rigoletto* paraphrase that November. About seven months later, Da Costa entered the HMV studios to record the same work and no doubt HMV envisioned a competitor for Scharrer's Columbia offering. Although in the many elaborate stage shows where she appeared, Da Costa only occasionally played a classical selection, her Liszt offering leaves no doubt that her pianism stood comparison with virtually any artist of her day. And if her



RAIE DA COSTA

rendition of Alfred Grünfeld's difficult Strauss paraphrase could have benefited from a bit more subtlety, her execution is so effortless that the effect is overwhelming. Arguably, Da Costa was a unique presence in twentieth-century pianism, and no doubt she would be far better remembered today had she not died tragically – at the age of twenty-nine – as the result of complications following a routine appendectomy.

On 26 March 1927, just as Hallis and Da Costa were forging a presence on the London concert scene, an eight-year-old child named



NINA MILKINA

Nina Milkin (1919–2006) made her first appearance at a TMPS recital as a student of Denise Lassimonne. Born in Moscow, her family had fled the Revolution, and she arrived in London a year earlier by way of Paris. In subsequent years she worked with Matthay and his student Harold Craxton and by 1937, now performing as Nina Milkina, she had caught the attention of Thomas Beecham, going on to perform in a concert series he sponsored devoted to Mozart. She soon achieved a reputation as one of the finest

miniaturists Matthay produced, specializing in Scarlatti, Haydn, Mozart and Chopin, but she made no recordings until she was nearly forty. The Scarlatti Sonatas included here, issued in 1958, have been taken from one of her first LPs. Although Westminster's engineering may not always do justice to the colours and resonance of her sound, the extraordinary clarity and musicality she imparts to these works shines through. The quicksilver changes required in the D minor, Kk396, are executed with effortless dispatch, and her D major, Kk29, captivates through its warmth and imagination as much as by its dazzling wizardry.

Outside of Britain, no nation was more eager to absorb Matthay's message than America. After *The Act of Touch* was published in 1903, only a handful of Americans journeyed to Wimpole Street, but after the War, this number swelled to a torrent, including the twenty-five-year-old **Bruce Simonds** (1895–1989). Born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Simonds had earned two degrees from Yale before arriving in Paris in 1919 to study composition with d'Indy, but he was so upset with the piano instruction he received there that he considered refocusing his efforts toward music history. When he met an Englishwoman who advised him that Matthay had some 'new ideas', he eagerly went to London in August of 1920 and soon abandoned all thought of continuing his studies in Paris. A stunning intellect and an extraordinary pianist, Simonds was offered a professorship at Yale in 1921, but he returned to London frequently through the 1920s, even teaching at the TMPS in the summer of 1925. On 4 July 1928, he gave a recital at Wigmore Hall,



BRUCE SIMONDS,
JULIAN DEGRAY &
ALBION METCALF IN 1928

and critics were so overwhelmed that one even cautioned aspiring Americans about 'the obvious dangers attending the prodigiously high standard they have set in the person of Bruce Simonds'.¹⁷ In 1925 Simonds became the first president of the American Matthay Association, an organization that still exists to promote Matthay's teachings, and in 1941 he became Dean of the Yale School of Music. By the mid-1950s, his reputation had become so pronounced that ten separate LPs were financed through private means to promote his artistry, followed by an eleventh containing two-piano works performed by Simonds and his wife, Rosalind – also a Matthay student. All bore the Carillon label, and the Schubert Impromptu featured here was taken from the fifth volume of the series. Although the microphones have not always captured the full beauty and resonance of his sound – and at times they pick up unwanted damper noise – this recording conveys a sense of Simonds's superb artistry, especially in the final variation.

Three years after Simonds first played for Matthay, a fifteen-year-old **Eunice Norton** (1908–2005) arrived at Wimpole Street with her mother, and she remained with Matthay for eight years. Perceived as a prodigy by most in

her native Minneapolis, her parents spared no expense to nurture her talent, and at sixteen she played in Queen's Hall under Henry Wood. She was joined by three of Matthay's teenaged students performing Bach's rarely heard four-keyboard transcription of Vivaldi's Concerto for four violins, and the performance was well received by the press. She soon became passionate about Bach, but she also excelled in the music of Beethoven, which stood her in good stead when she went to Berlin to work with Schnabel in 1932. While there, she was exposed to newer music and even studied some of Hindemith's works with the composer. After



EUNICE NORTON

she returned home, her life was centred in Pittsburgh, but she frequently returned to Minneapolis where she often performed with the orchestra. In the 1930s, the recording industry was severely depressed, and Victor took advantage of a curious clause in the contracts of the Minneapolis Orchestra musicians – and their conductor, a young Eugene Ormandy – that required them to work a specified number of hours each week, irrespective of how their time was spent. Thus, the Orchestra's board directed the musicians to devote eleven days in January of 1934, and twelve days the following January to record fifty-six separate works spanning over eighty discs. Since they were not required to pay the musicians – who worked six hours per day, seven days a week – Victor was only too happy to send their finest engineers and equipment, and the Orchestra's board was elated when, after three years, it had amassed over a million dollars in royalties. All the recordings were made in the acoustically unsympathetic Northrup Auditorium on the campus of the University of Minnesota, and the repertoire was vast, ranging from little-known contemporary works to massive undertakings such as Mahler's Symphony No 2 – a resounding critical success that catapulted Ormandy to international fame. Honegger's often charming Concertino for piano and orchestra (1924) was recorded on 15 January 1935, the penultimate work in a series that concluded with the Sibelius Symphony No 1 the following day. Honegger's idiom, which often deliberately avoids lyricism, is greatly enhanced by Norton's precision and sparkling, refined pianism.



RAY LEV

The daughter of a Jewish cantor, **Ray (Rachiel) Lev** (1912–1968) was born in Rostov-on-Don in southwest Russia and brought to the United States by her parents when she was only a year old. Reared partially in Connecticut, by her late teens she was living in Brooklyn and studying with Matthay's pupil Helene Diedrichs. Diedrichs, then living in Boston, maintained a studio in New York, and on 7 June 1930, she entered her eighteen-year-old student in the fourth annual Scholarship Auditions sponsored by the American Matthay



TOBIAS MATTHAY & DENISE LASSIMONNE circa 1930

Association. The AMA prize of \$1,000 was sufficient to guarantee Lev a year's study at the TMPS and she was able to extend her stay for another two years by winning a scholarship offered by the New York Philharmonic. By the late 1930s she had developed a substantial following on both sides of the Atlantic, and during World War II she was honoured by President Roosevelt for her frequent performances for American and Allied forces. Unfortunately, after the War her career was seriously derailed when her unrestrained

support for the Communist Party made her the only concert pianist to fall under governmental investigation, and her subsequent *persona non grata* status prevented her from regaining the stature she had once enjoyed. But she did make a number of recordings for the Concert Hall Society, a smaller New York label founded by two brothers after the War, and the grandest of Schumann's eight *Noveletten* is taken from one of her LPs released in 1952. Schumann's episodic, often enigmatic work extends to nearly ten minutes and is well served by Lev's highly spirited performance. Although the CHS engineers may have caught an over-abundance of upper partials, suggesting an exaggerated roughness of sound, her finely spun dynamic gradations shine through. As Matthay insisted, every note is rendered with musical intention, and her finesse and virtuosity are often electrifying.

Tobias Matthay's own playing

After 1900, Tobias Matthay rarely, if ever, performed in major venues, though he regarded it as an obligation to stay in shape at the instrument, and after completing a day of teaching and writing, he generally practised far into the night. The 12" recording he made for AFMC was his first commercial release and, like the 12" disc he recorded for Columbia nine years later, it is devoted entirely to his own music. Though the score was reissued by the AFMC in 1916, his Prelude in E – included on both recordings – is also the earliest work of those represented. The first of eight *Studies in the form of a Suite*, it dates from the spring of 1887, but only Numbers 1, 7, and 8 (all in the key of E) were published. At some point (no

later than 1897) he revised the Prelude, No 1 from the set, and 'affectionately dedicated' it to his pupils Gertrude Peppercorn and Lily West, as well as *Bravura* – the last of the three that were published – which he dedicated to York Bowen. His set of six *Monothemes* (subtitled 'Confidences and Confessions for the pianoforte'), though it bears an earlier opus number, did not appear till 1893. He was still performing when these pieces were written, and he often included them in his programmes. Of all the AFMC discs included here, Matthay's own recording may well be the most impressive, for he imparts miraculous colour and inflection to pieces that could easily deteriorate into sentimentality in the hands of a lesser artist. The fragmented pastiches of the sixth *Monotheme* are ethereal, unfolding in harp-like impressionistic waves that are devoid of any suggestion of harshness.

Despite an occasional missed note, Matthay's Prelude, which serves as a bridge between the two recording sessions represented here, is arguably given a slightly better realization on the Columbia disc, which was recorded in November of 1932, about three weeks after he had performed it on the BBC National Service. Airing on the evening of 25 October, the broadcast featured eight selections in all and it was so well received that Columbia asked him to commit a few of the pieces to disc about three weeks later. The Prelude was followed by his sparkling *Bravura* on the A side, and the B side contained two selections from *On Surrey Hills*, a suite of four programmatic miniatures he dedicated to Desirée MacEwan, intended specifically for the AFMC catalogue. Composed in April of 1919 at

High Marley, his country home on the Surrey/Sussex border, these masterful character pieces are meant to suggest springtime in the English countryside. The record's release was timed to commemorate Matthay's seventy-fifth birthday – 19 February 1933 – and it was highly praised. *The Gramophone* dubbed him the 'G.O.M. [Grand Old Man] of the piano world',¹⁸ and the *British Musician* observed that 'in every respect of flexibility, ease, speed and strength, one would fancy that some youthful prodigy of the piano were the performer'.¹⁹

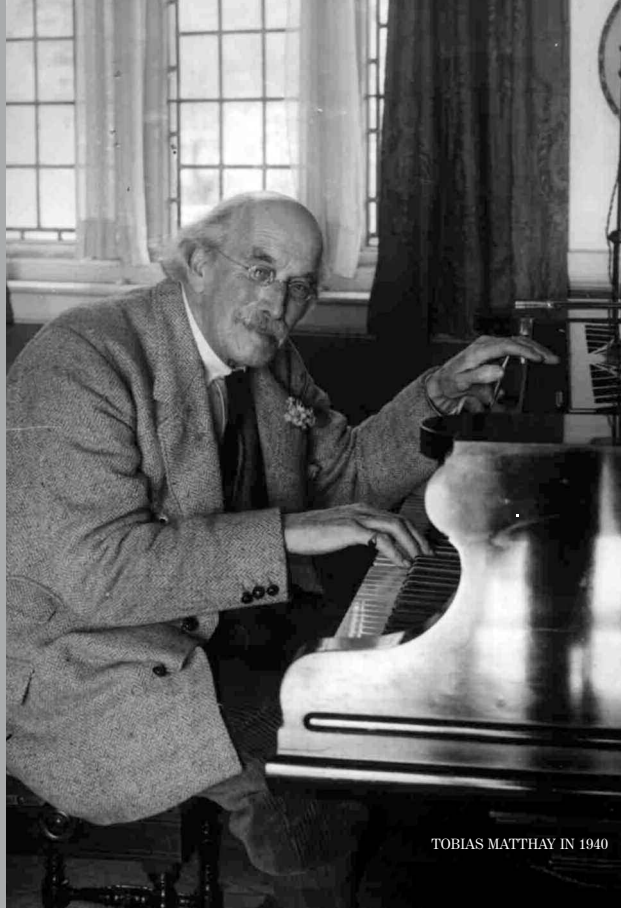
At this stage in his life, Matthay was no doubt pleased to receive recognition for his playing as much as for his teaching, but although he loved speed and brilliance, he never believed that technical facility was an end in itself – merely a means to serve musical values. Perhaps the tribute he might have cherished most is one that he never heard, for it was given by one of his former students at his memorial service on 19 December 1945 – five days after his death:

Beauty was his lodestar in life; he was her servant, her interpreter, and her instrument in creation.²⁰

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Pianist and musicologist Stephen Siek is the author of *England's Piano Sage: The Life and Teaching of Tobias Matthay* (2012)

- ¹ See Herbert F Biss, 'Another Review of Piano Records', *The Gramophone*, (January 1925): 278–81.
- ² Biss, 278.
- ³ Jacques Barzun, *Teacher in America* (Boston: 1945), 21.
- ⁴ Matthey's RAM student days are discussed in detail in my *England's Piano Sage: The Life and Teachings of Tobias Matthey* (Lanham, MD: 2012), 32–56.
- ⁵ See *England's Piano Sage*, 235–40, for a fuller discussion of the impact of World War I on Matthey's professional activities.
- ⁶ Biss, 281.
- ⁷ Matthey and McEwen had a serious rift in 1925, which led to the dissolution of the AFMC and Matthey's resignation from the Royal Academy that July. See *England's Piano Sage*, 257–73. The music catalogue of the company was absorbed by Oxford University Press, while Parlophone oversaw the production of the remaining discs. The last known were recorded, probably in 1926, by composer and pianist Alec Rowley.
- ⁸ See Nicholas Travers Morgan, 'The National Gramophonic Society' (Ph. D. diss. University of Sheffield, 2013), 255.
- ⁹ See Frank Andrews, 'We Also Have Our Own Records Part 1', *Hillandale News*, No 213, December 1996, 169.
- ¹⁰ At the same session on 28 October 1925, Scharrer also re-recorded Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau*, which probably remained unreleased for the same reason as the Chopin F sharp minor Prelude. In other words, the company saw little point in issuing an electrical version merely to compete with a satisfactory acoustical version of the same repertoire.
- ¹¹ Philip Stuart's comprehensive catalogue of Decca classical recordings notes that Clifford Curzon recorded the first movement of Schumann's G minor Sonata in West Hampstead on 11 November 1941, about six weeks after Denise recorded the Bach, but the work was neither completed nor released, As Stuart notes: 'Three more sides would probably have been required to complete the work.'
- ¹² Denise's relationship to the Mattheys is discussed in great detail throughout *England's Piano Sage*, beginning at page 240.
- ¹³ See William McNaught, *The Musical Times*, January 1942, 17. Stuart's Decca catalogue also notes that at the same June 1941 session when the Mozart was recorded, Denise accompanied violist Watson Forbes in Handel's Sonata in A, HWV 373, but the Handel was never released. Undoubtedly, the company would have needed to commit another 12" disc to make it available commercially. See item 0215.
- ¹⁴ As 'Hal Dolphe', Hallis created an opulent symphonic score for Hitchcock's *Rich and Strange* (1931), and as 'A Hallis', a suspenseful background for *Number Seventeen* (1932).
- ¹⁵ See 'Mr Adolph Hallis', *The Times*, 19 February 1937, 12.
- ¹⁶ *The Times*, 17 April 1937, 12.
- ¹⁷ See 'Bruce Simonds', *The Musical Times*, 1 August 1928, 747.
- ¹⁸ *The Gramophone*, March 1933. The magazine's critic noted that his review was written on 19 February.
- ¹⁹ Taken from Columbia's promotional brochure for Matthey's disc.
- ²⁰ From the address given by the Reverend Greville Cooke, composer and then a piano professor at the RAM. Matthey's memorial service was held at St John's Chapel in Woking.



TOBIAS MATTHAY IN 1940

A Note on the Recordings

More than half of the recordings in this set came from rough transfers provided to me on open-reel tape, CD-Rs and digital file downloads. The oldest (the unissued Lassimonne Bach) was derived from a tape made several decades ago. For all the sources, I corrected pitch, de-clicked, re-equalized and joined sides as needed.

Mark Obert-Thorn

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer:
Mark Obert-Thorn

Executive Producer:
Michael Spring

Assembling recordings, pictures and source information for this final volume of Matthay pupils has been a particular challenge and would not have been possible without a great deal of help

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