

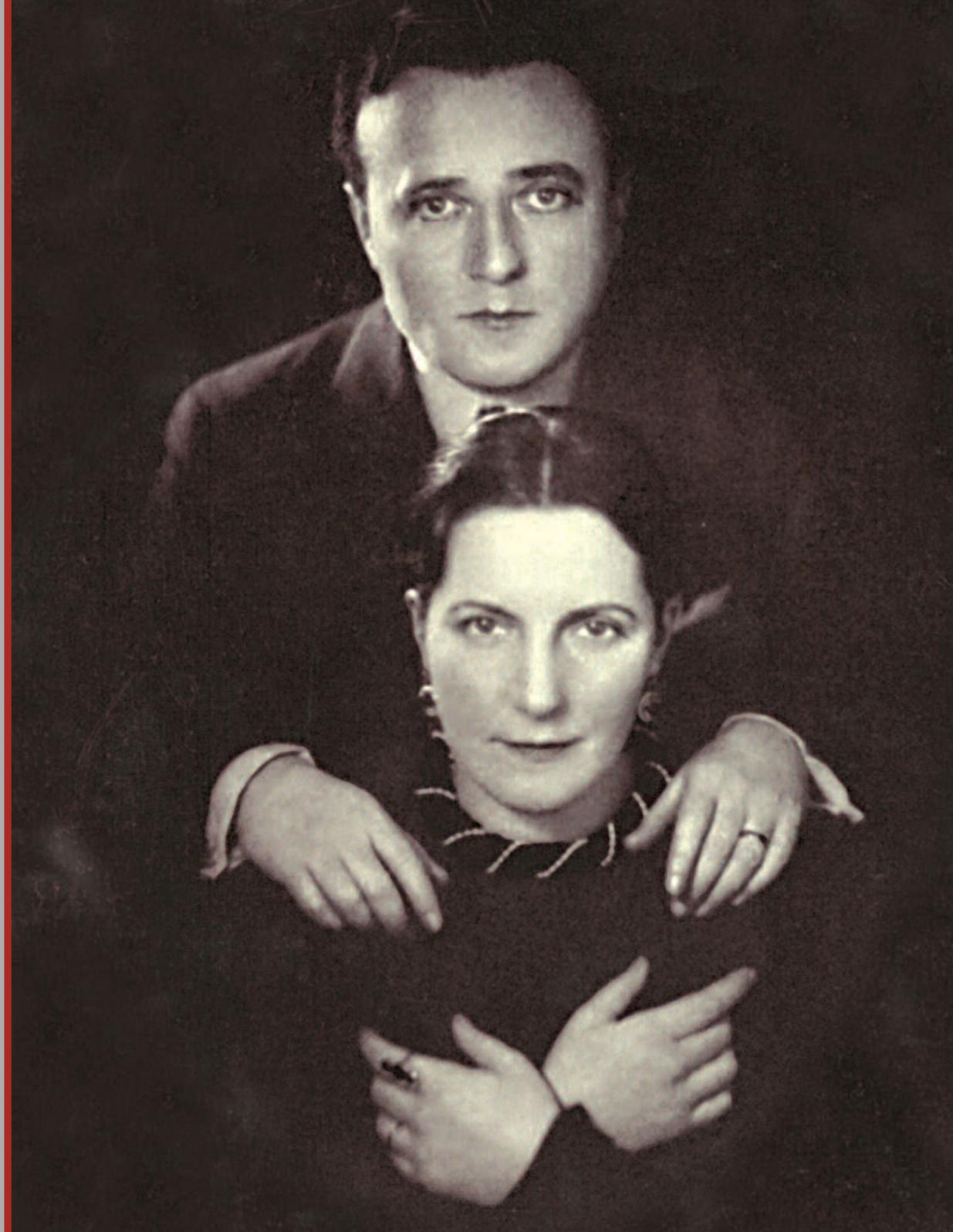
# BARTLETT & ROBERTSON

Selected  
recordings

1927–1947



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# BARTLETT & ROBERTSON

## Selected NGS, Homocord, HMV, & English/American Columbia Recordings 1927–1947

COMPACT DISC 1

(74.02)

1. BARTLETT (arr.) **Elizabethan Suite** (14.16)  
American Columbia set X-256 (XCO 34062, 34144, 34064, 34063)  
recorded on 2 January 1945, except 'His Conceit' and 'Earl of Salisbury' recorded on 12 January 1945  
BYRD Jhon Come Kisse Me Now – FARNABY His Conceit – BYRD The Earle of Salisbury's Pavane  
FARNABY A Toye – PEERSON The Fall of the Leafe – FARNABY Gigg Tower Hill  
FARNABY Tune for Two Virginals – FARNABY A Dreame – BULL The King's Hunting Jigge
2. BACH-MEDNIKOFF **Little Fugue in G minor** BWV578 (3.13)  
English Columbia DB 2371 (CA 20387-1); recorded on 12 May 1947
3. BACH-HORNE **Jesu, joy of man's desiring** from Cantata BWV147 (3.20)  
English Columbia DB 2371 (CA 20388-2); recorded on 12 May 1947
4. BACH-HOWE **Sheep may safely graze** from Cantata BWV208 (4.30)  
American Columbia 69818D (XCO 25637); recorded on 3 January 1940  
  
BACH **Concerto in C major** BWV1061 (17.04)  
HMV C-2648, 2649 (2B 5836-1, 5837-2, 5838-2, 5839-2); recorded on 20 December 1933
5. [Allegro] (7.16)
6. Adagio ovvero Largo (4.10)
7. Fuga (5.28)  
ORCHESTRA / JOHN BARBIROLI
8. SCHUMANN-DEBUSSY **Étude in the form of a canon** Op 56 No 4 (3.38)  
American Columbia set X-213 (XCO 29803); recorded on 29 January 1941
9. SCHUMANN **Andante and variations** Op 46 (12.24)  
American Columbia set X-213 (XCO 29797, 29798, 29799); recorded on 29 January 1941
10. SAINT-SAËNS **Variations on a theme of Beethoven** Op 35 (15.09)  
HMV C-2483, 2484 (2B 3282-3, 3283-2, 3284-3, 3281-4); recorded on 22 July 1932

1. PAGANINI-LISZT-TAYLOR **La Campanella** S141 No 3 (4.22)  
American Columbia 71452D (XCO 33167); recorded on 3 February 1942
2. LISZT-ROBERTSON **Liebesträume No 3** S541 No 3 (3.59)  
American Columbia 71452D (XCO 32396); recorded on 3 February 1942
3. ARENSKY **Valse** from Suite for two pianos No 1, Op 15 (4.11)  
HMV B-3634 (Bb 19309-4); recorded on 27 June 1930
4. STRAUSS-PAVIA **Concert Fantasy on themes from Die Fledermaus** (8.19)  
HMV C-2613 (2B 5264-2, 5265-3); recorded on 20 July 1933
5. GRANADOS-BARTLETT & ROBERTSON **Quejas, o La maja y el ruiseñor** from Goyescas (4.28)  
English Columbia DX-1476 (CAX 9900-1); recorded on 12 August 1947
6. INFANTE **Gracia (El vito)** Danses Andalouses, No 3 (2.50)  
Homocord D-1467 (B1304); recorded in 1929
7. FALLA-KOVACS **Spanish Dance No 1** from La vida breve (2.38)  
American Columbia 17516-D (CO 32612); recorded on 13 March 1942
8. LECUONA-NASH **Malagueña** from Andalucía Suite (2.47)  
American Columbia 17516-D (CO 32611); recorded on 13 March 1942
- DEBUSSY **En blanc et noir** (14.43)  
American Columbia set X-241 (XCO 30447/50); recorded on 29 April 1941
9. Avec emportement (4.13)
10. Lent, sombre (6.18)
11. Scherzando (4.03)
12. BAX **Moy Mell** (8.07)  
National Gramophonic Society 102 (116, 117XE); recorded circa November 1927
- BAX **Sonata for two pianos** (18.43)  
National Gramophonic Society 156, 157, 158 (WAX 5527-1, 5528-2, 5529-1, 5530-1, 5531-2); recorded on 15 April 1930
13. Molto moderato (7.28)
14. Lento espressivo (7.08)
15. Vivace e feroce (3.56)
16. BAX **Hardanger** (2.56)  
National Gramophonic Society 158 (5532-1); recorded on 15 April 1930



*Development is much easier if both pianists have been trained in the same school of technique ... two pianists who have the same technical approach will have no trouble introducing variety into their playing. But if they have entirely different styles, they will have a struggle to achieve balance and coordination.*

—Ethel Bartlett (1946)<sup>1</sup>

**D**UO-PIANISTS Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robertson were musical – and marital – partners for over three decades, and well versed in the same ‘school of technique’, an approach that no doubt facilitated the near-flawless balance and coordination for which they were so noted. Although they were not the only Matthey pupils to distinguish themselves as a duo,<sup>2</sup> their ensemble was far the most acclaimed, and up until Rae’s death in November 1956, they had given over twenty international tours. Once the world’s foremost two-piano team, they delighted listeners as varied as Eleanor Roosevelt, Toscanini and Benjamin Britten, who composed three original works for them.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is all the more surprising that today their art has been largely forgotten. Perhaps the reason rests – at least partially – with the nature of their medium, for despite the iconic composers who have enhanced the duo-pianists’ repertoire, even their best-known contributions remain largely overshadowed by the masterpieces available to the solo artist. As a consequence, virtually all established teams have augmented their repertoire with two-piano (or four-hand) arrangements, a practice that has often met with condescension from modern critics obsessed with textual accuracy. Fortunately, the present collection offers a window into Bartlett and Robertson’s musical world, and even though

the technology of their day could not always capture every nuance and subtlety of sound, modern listeners may still gain a sense of their precision, finesse and elegance.

Their compatibility as musical and life partners might never have been predicted by those familiar only with their early backgrounds. John Rae Robertson was born on 29 November 1893 to a minister in the Scottish village of Ardersier, near Inverness, the eighth of nine children. Although Rae remembered his mother singing Scottish folksongs to her family, music was given no particular emphasis in their home. But an elder sister who took piano lessons was soon astonished that, by the age of three, he was not only picking out tunes by ear, but performing all her assigned pieces without yet knowing how to read music. At five, he was playing the organ at his father’s church three times each Sunday, and at six, he was accepted as a scholarship pupil by a local woman who had attended the Leipzig Conservatory. As his talents blossomed, he acquiesced to his father’s stern admonitions that music was a ‘precarious’ livelihood, and entered the University of Edinburgh to read Modern Languages. But while there, he continued his piano studies with the Lancashire-born Philip Halstead, who had trained in Leipzig with Reinecke, and at Weimar with Liszt’s pupil Bernhard Stavenhagen. Well connected to



German musical culture, Halstead undoubtedly played no small role in helping Rae attain the University's Bucher Scholarship, intended to finance further studies with Teresa Carreño in Berlin. But the timing proved inopportune, since he was slated to arrive in the autumn of 1914. Thus, by September he found himself in London studying with Matthay at the Royal Academy of Music – a propitious union that lasted only four months before he too was

called up. Over the next few years, he confronted the grim realities that afflicted all too many young men at the front. In July 1916 he was wounded in the arm at the Battle of the Somme, and a year later, in the hand, at Ypres. Sent home to an English hospital, he underwent intensive therapy, and though he saw no further action he was not discharged till 1918, when he was at last permitted to resume his Academy studies.



The best available evidence confirms that Ethel Agnes Bartlett was born on the edge of Epping Forest on 6 June 1896, a date culled from a menu of choices, since in later years it appears she may have taken pains to disguise her year of birth.<sup>4</sup> To some extent, she drew a veil over her family background as well, once telling an interviewer that neither her brother nor sister pursued music professionally – to the ‘great joy’ of her mother.<sup>5</sup> But the underlying facts are more complex. Her younger sister, Edith, was a gifted soprano, winning a coveted Ada Lewis Scholarship to the RAM in 1915, the same year Ethel entered as the recipient of an Associated Board Scholarship, and understandably they often worked together. Ethel’s Academy piano studies were undertaken first with Frederick Moore, a devoted Matthay pupil, but she soon joined Matthay’s class, where she began to distinguish herself as an outstanding collaborative pianist. In addition to Edith, she played for many other students, and not surprisingly during the War years, most of her soloists were women – with one notable exception: a young RAM cellist, Giovanni Barbirolli (as he was then known) was only fifteen when she entered, and too young to serve. The two began a lifelong friendship and musical collaboration that continued even after he became one of the world’s most esteemed conductors. Ethel and Edith both graduated in 1919, and two years later gave a Wigmore Hall programme.<sup>6</sup> According to Edith’s son, the famed clarinetist Gervase de Peyer, his mother later lost her voice due to ‘bad training’, and barely spoke at all during his childhood: ‘It was pretty grim. She finally got over that.’<sup>7</sup> It may be understandable that

Ethel withheld such details from the numerous interviews she gave throughout her career.

By her late teens, Ethel's striking beauty caught the attention of a family friend, Dame Laura Knight (1877–1970) and her husband, Harold (1874–1961), both of whom sketched and painted her on numerous occasions over the next twenty years.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps it was inevitable that she also drew the gaze of many a young man returning to the Academy after military service, and Rae was no exception. They were married in Marylebone in September of 1921, and had already begun to pursue independent careers, augmenting their incomes by teaching at Matthay's school on Wimpole Street, and accepting such engagements as came their way. Ethel continued to work as Barbirolli's exclusive accompanist, but she collaborated with other musicians as well, and often performed as a soloist.<sup>9</sup> Rae's early appearances were remarkably varied. In February of 1921, some seven months before they married, he performed major works of Chopin, Debussy and Scriabin in London's Aeolian Hall, but – following in the footsteps of Matthay's pupils Harold Craxton, Harriet Cohen and Myra Hess – he began his programme with Elizabethan works by Byrd and John Bull, a stylistic period he and his wife would often revisit as duo-pianists. Two years later, a solo



programme at Wigmore Hall brought praise from *The Times*, which noted that his technique 'is capable of anything',<sup>10</sup> and five months later when he performed Strauss's *Burleske* with Henry Wood at a Proms concert, at least one critic felt that he made 'the rather empty cadenza passages' sound 'at

least grandiloquent, and presented the whole work in a most favourable light'.<sup>11</sup>

In July 1928, he even appeared at His Majesty's Theatre in a revival of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, a tour de force for four pianos in which Matthay allied him with three of his finest students: a young Clifford Curzon, and two superbly gifted Americans, Lyell Barbour and Frank Mannheimer. *The Times* was again impressed: 'It is of course fiendishly difficult to execute, and the four pianists ...

may be congratulated'.<sup>12</sup>

The first performance by the Robertsons as duo-pianists is somewhat difficult to document, since Matthay encouraged ensemble playing with all of his pupils, but it appears they launched their formal partnership at Wigmore Hall on 17 June 1924, a recital that received mixed reviews from the press.<sup>13</sup> However, less than two months later on 15 August, they joined Wood at Queen's Hall for a Proms engagement featuring Bach's Concerto in C for two keyboards, BWV1061, and *The Times* praised their performance for its 'great



zest, as though they really enjoyed every note of the contrapuntal figuration'.<sup>14</sup> The recording they laid down in HMV's London studios (Disc 1) nine years later, on 20 December 1933, shows the same spirit and clarity. This time assisted by Barbirolli conducting an unidentified chamber orchestra, HMV's offering, originally issued on two discs, appears to have been the first commercial release of this work, and it set a remarkable standard. The ensemble of the two soloists is virtually flawless, even at cadence points, where they broaden in expres-

sive synchronization and often enhance their lines with beautifully executed ornamentation. The high point is arguably the third movement, a massive fugue where only the pianos are heard for the first 32 bars, and where every voice seems to speak with a majestic importance.

By the time HMV released the Bach Concerto, Bartlett and Robertson were already internationally famous, having toured America and commissioned works from several noted composers. Not surprisingly, no fewer than five such compositions came from Arnold Bax, also



a marvellous pianist, who had studied with Matthay for five years and remained close to many of his RAM classmates long after graduation. One of the Robertsons' earliest recordings was Bax's popular 'Irish tone-poem' *Moy Mell* ('The pleasant plain'), which he composed in 1916 for Myra Hess and Irene Scharrer, and which became a staple of their own two-piano recitals. Unfortunately they never recorded it, and the 1927 National Gramophonic Society offering included here (all Bax selections are on Disc 2) appears to be the only recorded performance by Matthay-trained artists. Recorded for NGS at Vocalion's Islington studios, the final product suffers from some technological imperfections (for example, the final bass notes in Piano I are virtually inaudible), but Bax's tunes, as well as his impressionistic clusters, are always shaped with inflection, reflecting Matthay's insistence that such passages never be rendered merely as 'chunks of sound'. Although Vocalion's microphones could not capture every variance of tone, the dynamic gradations that emerge are remarkable, and one senses an extraordinary tonal palette from both artists, who often effortlessly appear to merge into a single voice. The Robertsons were so close to Bax that



seven months later, in June 1928, they even welcomed his mother, Ellen – along with the Knights – into their St John's Wood home, where they tried out some new repertoire.<sup>15</sup> Two weeks later they premiered two of those works, Bax's *The poisoned fountain*, which (in his words) was filled with 'daring' harmonies rendering it 'truly menacing', and *The devil that tempted St Anthony*, a reworking of an earlier Scriabin-like solo piece.<sup>16</sup> The NGS elected not to record either work, but two years later, the organization released his energetic *Hardanger* (1927), a homage to Grieg which at times evokes qualities of the popular Norwegian folk instrument, and which the Robertsons paired with the largest work Bax composed for them: his Sonata for two pianos.

Completed in 1929, just on the heels of the composer's Symphony No 3, Bax's Sonata was well received at its New York premiere in January 1930. Before they began, Rae gave a short introductory speech to the Town Hall audience, referencing the recent success of the Symphony in Boston under Koussevitzky, and stressing that the Sonata was 'not to be regarded as programme music', but rather as the composer's 'reaction to some experience which stirred his imagination

profoundly'.<sup>17</sup> Though Bax must have provided the background, he later tried to disavow it, expressing annoyance at Robertson's speech and even alleging that some members of the audience objected to it.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the work was applauded by the *New York Times*, which praised the 'delicate and poetic charm' of the composer's 'impressionistic picture of Celtic lore'.<sup>19</sup> However, after the duo's NGS recording appeared nine months later, critic Compton Pakenham, writing for the same paper, could manage only lukewarm acceptance for Bax as a composer, 'in fairness to him and for the sake of those devoted enthusiasts who have gone to so much trouble'.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, the first movement, in disguised sonata form, is a complex essay in impressionism, and according to Rae, suggestive of a 'Poem of Spring'. The colours, tonal variety, and precision conveyed by the pianists amid the frequent split-second tempo changes, are nothing short of remarkable. The second movement is the most overtly programmatic, recounting a Celtic legend wrought with 'unearthly music', reaching faintly across an ever more turbulent sea before the 'fairy melody' returns and fades into silence. Rae characterized the third movement as a raucous, rhythmic folk dance 'somewhat rough and fierce in its merry-making', but it is also a virtuosic show piece, and here the artists deliver a riveting, virtually spellbinding performance. (Oddly, Bax's only reaction to their interpretation was to dismiss it – perhaps facetiously – as 'much too accurate'.<sup>21</sup>)

The Bax recordings were among the last discs issued by the NGS, and by 1930 Bartlett and Robertson had signed with HMV. In addition to the Bach Concerto, they recorded



several major works for that label, including the well-known Saint-Saëns *Variations* on the trio from the minuet to Beethoven's Sonata in E flat, Op 31 No 3 (Disc 1). Perhaps the most impressive feature of their performance is its sense of scale, for in their hands a work that might be seen as mere nineteenth-century excess is transformed into an epic statement, crowned by a massive fugue which rises to a breathtaking climax in the coda. Despite a few lapses in ensemble and accuracy, their vision is mesmerizing, and their virtuosity often overpowering. Their HMV release of the familiar

waltz from Arensky's Suite, Op 15 (Disc 2), is arguably better than their later version for Columbia, if only because they were permitted to perform it in its entirety. But though their performance is satisfying, the dynamics sound surprisingly flat when compared with the enormous contrasts in their other recorded work. For example, the *fff* marking in Piano II at bar 49 seems totally ignored, and one wonders if the microphone placement was optimum, or even if HMV's technicians might have overly 'adjusted' the finished product, perhaps in an effort to minimize distortion.

Bartlett and Robertson began recording for Columbia in 1939, and three of the major works they issued on that label – all recorded in New York in 1941 – are filled with wondrous moments. In their hands, Schumann's *Andante and variations* (Disc 1) becomes an eloquent, resilient tapestry, with perfectly synchronized rubatos illustrating Matthay's maxim that musical phrases should never be slavishly constrained by bar lines. Though their recording is not flawless in its execution, their intimacy (which is also seen in Debussy's transcription of Schumann's fourth 'canon' *Étude*) is captivating, and serves to enhance the thunder, which this work also contains. And arguably, one of the great masterpieces of their recording career is Debussy's remarkably sophisticated *En blanc et noir* (Disc 2), which they imbue with a kaleidoscopic palette of glittering colour. Though its three movements extend to nearly fifteen minutes, the recording of Elizabethan keyboard works (Disc 1) that they laid down four years later is nearly as long. Obviously, these treatments are highly stylized adaptations, but one of the Farnaby



works was actually written for two virginals, and Oxford published the Robertsons' arrangement of it in 1934 (along with a Couperin two-keyboard *Allemande*) as part of an ongoing series of B&R editions and transcriptions. Ethel's adaptations of the other pieces – which Oxford titled *Elizabethan Suite* – were not published till 1947, but they had long been part of the artists' repertoire. With the exception of Byrd's 'Earle of Salisbury' Pavane from *Parthenia*, they were all (even the Farnaby duet) from the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*. Though modern listeners may cringe a bit at

adaptations that seem to eschew authenticity in favour of nineteenth-century virtuosity, their 'Elizabethan' recordings show some remarkable pianism. In addition, Ethel's arrangements, which are careful to preserve the modality and dissonance of the originals, often capture a poignant intimacy, and the explosive 'King's Hunt' is remarkably faithful to Bull's original conception – at least in spirit.

Not surprisingly, all the remaining selections presented here are arrangements, even Manuel Infante's own transcription of the *Gracia* (Disc 2) from his 'Andalusian Dance Suite', written in Paris in the early 1920s for José Iturbi – the sole recording in this collection released on the German Homocord label. The others, with one exception, were all issued by the English and American divisions of Columbia. The exception is HMV's release of Leo Pavia's grandiose adaptation of themes from *Die Fledermaus*, heavily framed around Adele's 'laughing song'. It was clearly meant as a crowd pleaser, as were the shorter arrangements of familiar favourites, including the Robertsons' four-hand transcription of Granados's 'Maiden and the Nightingale', published by J & W Chester in 1944. A great

favourite of Matthay and his students, Granados's colourful portrait is faithfully served by this arrangement, allowing for the intrusion of some ethereal obbligatos, and a coda that transforms the solo nightingale into a celestial choir. The two Liszt arrangements also follow the originals closely, and the Robertsons' rendition of Colin Taylor's transcription of *La Campanella* is stunning in its virtuosity. Rae's arrangement of *Liebesträume* No 3 was another favourite, as evidenced by their coast-to-coast broadcast on 6 July 1942, when they performed it on NBC radio's *Bell Telephone Hour*. The Falla and Lecuona selections are also brilliantly executed, though it could be argued that Grace Helen Nash's arrangement of *Malagueña* is often unimaginative. But the three Bach arrangements (all on Disc 1) are well crafted and exquisitely performed. Of these, the best-known among Matthay's followers was undoubtedly Elsie Horne's 1932 transcription of *Jesu, joy of man's desiring*, closely patterned on Myra Hess's solo version published in 1926. And in the Bach set – as always with Bartlett and Robertson – their art beguiles with intimacy as much as grandeur.

Stephen Siek © 2013

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See 'Two Piano Playing is Chamber Music'. *Musical America*, 25 March 1946. Ethel was interviewed by Robert Sabin.
- <sup>2</sup> Myra Hess and Irene Scharrer, for example, often appeared as duo-pianists, and even performed to a sold-out house in New York's Town Hall in December 1927. Regrettably, they never recorded any two-piano repertoire. See my *England's Piano Sage: The Life and Teachings of Tobias Matthay* (Lanham, MD: 2012), 310–11.
- <sup>3</sup> They played Lennox Berkeley's newly composed *Polka*, Op 5, for Mrs Roosevelt in 1934, and four years later performed the Brahms *Liebeslieder* waltzes under Toscanini at Queen's Hall, a concert Ethel always remembered as one of the highpoints of their career. Britten's most significant work for them was the *Scottish Ballad*, Op. 26, which they premiered with the Cincinnati Symphony under Eugene Goossens in 1941.
- <sup>4</sup> Many normally reliable sources give Ethel's birth year as 1900, including Percy Scholes's *The Mirror of Music*, published in 1947, and the *New Grove*, published in 1980. After she died in April of 1978, both *The Times* (21 June 1978) and the *Musical Times* (1 October 1978) gave her age as 77, suggesting that she may have been complicit in allowing 1900 or even 1901 to stand as her 'public' year of birth.
- <sup>5</sup> See Mary Vonderahe, 'Bartlett and Robertson Top in Two-Piano Music', *Torrance [CA] Herald*, 5 February 1948, 2-B.
- <sup>6</sup> Their concert was managed by Ibbs and Tillett. See Christopher Fifield, *Ibbs and Tillett: The Rise and Fall of a Musical Empire* (Aldershot, Hants.: 2005), 110.
- <sup>7</sup> John Robert Brown, 'Gervase de Peyer in his 80th Year', rep. from *The Clarinetist*, December 2005. The article is available at De Peyer's web site, <http://www.gervasedepeyer.com/reminisces.html>, accessed July 2013.
- <sup>8</sup> Harold's 1925 painting of Ethel was even awarded a prize in a Parisian art show, as reported by *The Times*: 'Except the Holbeinesque "Portrait d'André Gide", by Paul Albert Laurens, there is nothing in that kind with the distinction of Harold Knight's "Ethel Bartlett", which has justly received a silver medal, though there are plenty of clever works.' See 'Pictures in Paris', 10 July 1925, 10.
- <sup>9</sup> She gave a solo recital at Wigmore Hall on 26 January 1926. Her program included Beethoven's Sonata, Op 110. See 'Recitals of the Week', *The Times*, 29 January 1926, 10.
- <sup>10</sup> See 'Recitals of the Week', *The Times*, 23 March 1923, 10.
- <sup>11</sup> See 'The Promenade Concerts', *The Times*, 16 August 1923, 11.
- <sup>12</sup> See 'The Russian Ballet', *The Times*, 12 July 1928, 12.
- <sup>13</sup> See *England's Piano Sage*, 311. *The Times's* critic was less than kind: 'They have not fully understood yet that the point of playing on two pianos is not to get more sound but to work out intricate detail more clearly'.
- <sup>14</sup> See 'Promenade Concert', *The Times*, 16 August 1924, 8.
- <sup>15</sup> See Ellen Ridley Bax's thank-you letter to the Robertsons, dated 5 June 1928, in the Archives of the Royal Academy of Music at <http://apollo.ram.ac.uk/emuweb/pages/ram/display.php?irn=23783>. Accessed July 2013.
- <sup>16</sup> Bax's 'menacing' comment was made to Adrian Boult. See Lewis Foreman, *Bax: a composer and his times*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, Hants.: 1989), 252.
- <sup>17</sup> Quoted in Foreman, 253.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> See 'Recital for two Pianos', *New York Times*, 24 January 1930, 30.
- <sup>20</sup> Compton Pakenham, 'Newly Recorded Music', *New York Times*, 19 October 1930, 122.
- <sup>21</sup> Foreman, 252.

## Engineer's Note

The recordings used for this reissue were commercially released shellac pressings which were variable in sonic as well as surface noise quality.

The majority of the pressings were from late American Columbia discs, which posed a number of problems. Most of them were laminated, which resulted in circumferential scratching and low frequency noises and rumble. In addition, all of these recordings were dubs from the original 16" lacquer discs that were cut at the original sessions; as a result, the sound of each recording varied considerably from session to session. By using drastic digital equalization, I was able to make this series of recordings as pleasant a listening experience as possible.

The HMV and British Columbia recordings sound better since they are from original matrices and not dubs. However, they do suffer from cactus needle 'fibering' noise, resulting in a certain amount of residual crackle that could not be entirely eliminated without completely altering the overall frequency response of these discs.

Perhaps the most problematic recordings in this issue are from the National Gramophonic Society. The overall signal level is relatively low, with an additional problem of the discs being pressed on rather noisy shellac, compounded by the above-mentioned 'fibering'

problem. Note that there are some noisy grooves in *Moy Mell* that could not be removed successfully; this may have been due to defective metal part processing. Through careful noise reduction application and digital equalization, these recordings can sound quite respectable, if still a bit primitive, for early electrical recordings.

I've utilized CEDAR's Cambridge Version 8 Restoration Suite, which removes clicks, pops, crackle, and broadband noises. The processed digital signal was transferred to the SADiE Disc Editor, Version 5.6.2, where the sound files were edited and compiled to create the finished masters. Two additional plug-ins available for the SADiE Editor were employed: the first is CEDAR's background Decrackle module, which was very effective in removing a certain amount of low level tracing distortion that is inherent in disc transfers. The second is CEDAR's Retouch module, which is indispensable for restoring a damaged signal due to bad clicks, thumps, noises and stripped grooves. It is also very effective in removing scratching noises as well as smoothing out surface noise changes at side joins.

One final note: all transfers were done at 96kHz/24-bit word length, which produces a more transparent result when processed with CEDAR's NR-5 broadband noise reduction module.

Seth B Winner



Audio restoration:  
Seth B Winner Sound Studios, Inc.

Executive Producer:  
Michael Spring

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