



BAX

Violin Sonatas • 2

No. 2 • G minor • F major

Lawrence Jackson, Violin • Ashley Wass, Piano



Arnold Bax (1883–1953)

Violin Sonatas • 2

From the perspective of a hundred years on, we might now regard Arnold Bax and his brother Clifford as enviably privileged, albeit immensely talented - Arnold became a composer, his brother a playwright and author. Their parents' Hampstead mansion, Ivy Bank, provided a wonderful stage for their adolescence and young manhood where, supported by their adoring mother, a constant succession of brilliant contemporaries visited to play music, laze in the extensive gardens and dream impossible dreams of 'more than life can give' (as Clifford put it). Arnold's father had envisaged Cambridge, but Arnold would have none of it and studied at London's Royal Academy of Music during 1900-1905. Once this was completed both brothers, given freedom by their private incomes, never felt any pressure formally to earn a living by seeking paid work. Both were free to travel, develop their art and indulge in a succession of love affairs, which in Arnold's case are reflected in his music.

Despite such prodigal blessings, however, Arnold Bax only slowly evolved his mature style, and so his wider reputation and the music by which we remember him did not really begin to appear until a couple of years before the First World War. It was Clifford who introduced his older brother to the poetry of W.B. Yeats and the country, legends and people of the west of Ireland. He soon discovered the remote Donegal coastal village of Glencolumcille, and the wild landscape and stormy sea-dominated climate of the west can be fairly described as the catalyst in the development of his mature style.

Arnold wrote at least five violin sonatas, but only published three of them. Here we hear his autobiographical *Second Sonata* of 1915, reflecting wartime concerns in the context of the earliest, a one movement *Allegro appassionato* in G minor written in 1901 while he was a student, and the last, in two movements, which we have only recently got to know in this form as he withheld it as a sonata and recast it as the *Nonet* of 1931. All are characterized by his girlfriends and a succession of women players. The early G minor,

written for his Academy girlfriend Gladys Lees, was later played by another RAM contemporary Ivy Angove. The *First Sonata*, first written in 1910, was revised over a long period but was actually inspired by his passion for a Ukrainian girl whom he met in the autumn of 1909. On the manuscript Bax calls her 'M'selle Natalia Skarginski' (more properly Natalie Skarginska). It was first played by a very young (and gorgeous) Winifred Smith. It is possible the *Second Sonata* may have been inspired by the playing of May Harrison, but it was actually played by Bessie Rawlins. The *Third Sonata*, in 1927, was played by Emil Telmányi and later May Harrison.

In 1915 Bax wrote new second and third movements for his *First Sonata* (Naxos 8.557540). The original slow movement's waltz-like middle-section tune in popular style is surely the precursor of '*The Grey Dancer in the Twilight*' which we hear here in the *Second Sonata*, written in 1915.

If the first sonata takes its starting-point from girlfriends and Bax's emotional entanglements, the second has a much more serious gestation, the First World War. It was written in the summer of 1915 and dated 13th August. Like the *First Sonata* it long went unperformed, until in 1920 Bax revised it, making cuts and generally tightening it up. It was brought out after the success of the performance of the *First Sonata* with Bessie Rawlins, and five months later she again appeared with Bax at the Wigmore Hall in the première of this *Second Sonata*. It was published in 1923.

At the time of its first performance a handbill appeared promoting the concert carrying a programme note, unsigned, but clearly by the composer. In it Bax wrote: 'This Sonata was written in 1915, but for various reasons has hitherto been withheld by the composer. Recently it has been considerably revised. The work is in four distinct movements, though the whole is played without a break. The end of each of the first three divisions of the sonata is designed to create an impression of pause and expectancy, so that the plan of the various movements should be clear to the listener. The work is in

cyclic form, and the principal motive which dominates the whole sonata is used also in the same composer's orchestral piece, *November Woods*. (The second movement, which might also be called "The Dance of Death", was influenced in a particular degree by the events of 1915). Later when it was broadcast Bax asked for it to be described as 'Sonata in four linked movements'.

In the second movement the violin is muted throughout, and the appearance of the *Dies irae* also clearly underlines its subject matter. The closing section of the last movement was called 'Epilogue' at the first performance. Though the term does not appear in the published score the quiet closing coda clearly carries a similar significance to the epilogues he later designated at the end of his symphonies.

During the First World War, in addition to the *Second Violin Sonata* and two new movements for his *First Sonata*, Bax wrote two substantial one movement pieces, the *Legend* of 1915 and the *Ballad* of 1916, the first reflecting the first few months of war, the latter probably the unexpected tragedy of the Easter Rising in Dublin in March 1916. As if to underline its association with the events in Ireland, the music seems to have been suppressed for over a decade and it only became known to a wider public when it was revised and published in 1929. Bax was clearly long in two minds about releasing it, because it was first advertised in 1922 but it failed to appear. It is unclear whether it was played by Winifred Small, its dedicatee, with Harriet Cohen, in the concert in which they first performed the *Legend* at London's Æolian Hall on 28th June 1916.

The turbulent opening of the *Ballad* sets the mood. Bax himself referred to the piece as 'a wild stormy thing'. There are two moods – the passionate turbulent music of the opening and the romantic reflective music of the

interlude-like sections.

The *Legend* for violin and piano was completed in February 1915, and, elegiac in character, but increasingly concentrated in expression, was Bax's first musical acknowledgement of what he referred to as 'the horror of that time'. Yet, apart from the final climax with its pounding piano chords, there is no battle music, drama or overt horror in this grieving score, Bax preferring to sing his song of mourning in terms of an archetypal past and a sustained singing line. Towards the end we are in the world of the *Second Sonata*. It is interesting to remember in his poem *The Guest House*, Bax, who never joined up, writes vividly of being 'house-mate with old bony Death'.

Bax's last work for violin and piano (other than his *Violin Concerto* of 1938, only published in a version for violin and piano) was his two-movement *Sonata in F* completed in September 1928, which he suppressed in his lifetime as he soon scored it as the *Nonet*, dated January 1930. This was produced to fulfil a commission from the Bradford Triennial Festival, where it was first performed on 30th September 1930. It was not performed as a sonata until the celebrations for the centenary of Bax's birth in 1983.

The sonata is in two movements, and is notable for its sunny serenade-like character. The first movement *Molto moderato* – *Allegro* features two principal ideas, the first of which generates most of the argument, the second appearing as a romantic interlude. In the second movement, *Allegro*, the gently singing second subject dominates with just a brief stormy episode based on the opening idea before a reminiscence of the opening theme of the whole sonata leads to tranquil closing music in a magical half-lit dusk.

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Laurence Jackson

After studying at Chethams School of Music, Laurence Jackson won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music in 1984, where he studied with Emanuel Hurwitz, Maurice Hasson and Anne-Sophie Mutter and was a prize-winner at the 1985 Yehudi Menuhin Concours de Paris Competition. In November 1990 he received first prize at the Seventeenth International Violin Competition 'Dr Luis Sigall' held in Viña del Mar in Chile and subsequently he gave concerto and

recital performances throughout South America. Since making his Royal Festival Hall début in 1990 he has forged a successful career both as a soloist and chamber musician, appearing with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra as well as directing the Guildhall Strings, Calgary Festival Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and guest leading the London Festival Orchestra and Britten Sinfonia. In 2006, he accepted the position of Leader of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, with which he will be also appearing as soloist. From 1994 to 2006 Laurence Jackson was leader of the Maggini Quartet, with which he toured throughout the United States, Canada and Europe to much critical acclaim, and worldwide sales of their Naxos series have exceeded 100,000 discs. With the Maggini Quartet he won the Gramophone Chamber Music Award of the Year 2001, the 2002 Cannes Classical Award and most recently, the quartet was nominated for a Grammy Award in both 2004 and 2005. As well as his numerous award-winning recordings with the Maggini Quartet, he has recently recorded John Jeffreys *Violin Concerto* (Meridian) and Frank Martin's *Violin Sonata* (ASV) with Iain Burnside (piano). The first volume of his recording with the pianist Ashley Wass for Naxos of the complete repertoire for violin and piano by Sir Arnold Bax (Naxos 8.557540) was released in September 2006 to wide critical acclaim. Laurence Jackson is an Honorary Fellow of both Brunel University, London and Canterbury Christ Church University, and he was awarded an ARAM in 1998. He plays a violin made by J. B. Vuillaume, circa 1850.

Ashley Wass

The young British pianist Ashley Wass is recognised as one of the rising stars of his generation. Only the second British pianist in twenty years to reach the finals of the Leeds Piano Competition (in 2000), he was the first British pianist ever to win the top prize at the World Piano Competition in 1997. He appeared in the Rising Stars series at the 2001 Ravinia Festival and his promise has been further acknowledged by the BBC, who selected him to be a New Generations Artist over two seasons. Ashley Wass studied at Chethams Music School and won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music to study with Christopher Elton and Hamish Milne. In 2002 he was made an Associate of the Royal Academy. He has spent three summers as a participant at the Marlboro Music Festival, playing chamber music with musicians such as Mitsuko Uchida, Richard Goode and members of the Guarneri Quartet and Beaux Arts Trio. He has given recitals at most of the major British concert halls, including the Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Symphony Hall, Purcell Room, Bridgewater Hall, the Sage and St David's Hall, with appearances at the City of London, Bath, Brighton, Harrogate and Cheltenham Festivals. His concerto performances have included Beethoven and Brahms with the Philharmonia, Mendelssohn with the Orchestre National de Lille and Mozart with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra at the Vienna Konzerthaus and the Brucknerhaus in Linz. Wass has also worked with Sir Simon Rattle and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony, Scottish Symphony and Philharmonic Orchestras and the London Mozart Players. In June 2002 he appeared in a gala concert at Buckingham Palace to mark the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, a performance broadcast live to millions of viewers around the world. Other notable engagements have included several return visits to the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Philharmonia, and hugely successful débuts with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. He has also made acclaimed débuts in Sweden, Portugal, Israel, Germany, France, Finland, Switzerland, the United States and Cuba. He made his début recording in 1999 with a solo recital disc of works by César Franck for Naxos (8.554484), followed by a series of recordings of British piano music. His recordings of Bax's piano music have received critical acclaim, with Volume 1 (8.557439) selected as Editor's Choice by *The Gramophone* and nominated in the Best Instrumental Disc category of the Gramophone Awards. Other highly acclaimed releases include the piano works of Elgar and Bridge, and the first volume of Bax violin sonatas with Laurence Jackson (Naxos 8.557540).



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DDD

Playing Time
73:30

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A far cry from the heart-on-sleeve romanticism of his *First Violin Sonata* (Naxos 8.557540), Bax's *Second Violin Sonata* reflects the composer's concerns regarding the First World War. This is particularly evident in the second movement, described by the composer as a 'dance of death' in which the violin remains muted throughout. The *Legend* and *Ballad* were composed around the time of Bax's finest symphonic poems and share those works' refined drama as well as their lush exoticism. The unnumbered *Sonata in F*, actually Bax's fourth and last Violin Sonata, was suppressed by the composer during his lifetime as he soon scored it as the *Nonet*. It was not performed as a sonata until the celebrations for the centenary of Bax's birth in 1983.

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(1883–1953)

Violin Sonata No. 2 (1915)	30:55
1 Slow and gloomy	7:13
2 The Grey Dancer in the Twilight	5:45
3 Very broad and concentrated	8:57
4 Allegro feroce	9:00
5 Ballad for Violin and Piano (1916)	6:48
6 Legend for Violin and Piano (1915)	9:28
7 Sonata in G minor (1901): Allegro appassionato	7:34
Sonata in F major (1928)	18:45
8 Molto moderato	9:39
9 Allegro	9:06

Laurence Jackson, Violin • Ashley Wass, Piano

Recorded at Potton Hall, Westleton, Suffolk, England, on 4th December, 2004 (Tracks 1–4) and from 1st to 4th December, 2005 • Producer and Editor: Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd.)

Engineer: Eleanor Thomason • This recording was made and edited at 24bit resolution

Booklet Notes: Lewis Foreman • Publishers: Chappell Music (Tracks 1-5), Augener Ltd. (Track 6) and the Bax Estate (Tracks 7-9) • Cover Picture: *Scenic View of Bundoran Beach, Donegal, Ireland* by Chris van Lennep (Gallo Images / Getty Images)