NAXOS

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Arthur BLISS

Oboe Quintet

Piano Quartet

Viola Sonata

Maggini Quartet

Peter Donohoe, Piano

Martin Outram, Viola

Nicholas Daniel, Oboe

Arthur Bliss (1891-1975)
Piano Quartet • Sonata for Viola and Piano • Oboe Quintet

Arthur Bliss belongs to the generation of English composers who came to maturity in the years between the two World Wars. It was once the accepted view that he had moved from the modernism of the 1920s into a more conventional Elgarian romanticism. It is only now, in a new century, that it is proving possible to see his work in a truer perspective.

The son of a New England businessman and his amateur pianist wife, Arthur Bliss was born in London in 1891. He and his brothers were brought up by their father, after the early death of their mother. Educated at Rugby and then at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he was a pupil of Charles Wood and came to know Edward Dent, he spent a year at the Royal College of Music, before joining the army, in which he served from 1914 until demobilisation in 1919. At the Royal College he was a contemporary of Herbert Howells, whose talent he particularly admired, and of Eugene Goossens, Ivor Gurney and Arthur Benjamin, but had little in common with Stanford, his teacher. As an officer in the Royal Fusiliers and later in the Grenadier Guards, Bliss shared the horrors of trench warfare, wounded, later gassed, and mentioned in despatches. His brother Kennard was killed in action, a loss Bliss felt keenly.

In the years after the war Bliss began to make a name for himself in London, writing music that occasionally provoked a hostile reaction from conservative critics. Works of his were heard abroad, and his *A Colour Symphony*, commissioned by Elgar, together with works by Howells and Goossens, was played at the Three Choirs Festival in 1922, although not on that occasion to his own satisfaction. He spent the years 1923 and 1924 in America with his father and his brother Howard and in 1925 married, before returning with his wife to England, to engage once more in composition, largely neglected during his stay abroad.

Often drawing inspiration from distinguished performers, in the summer of 1939 Bliss found himself in New York, where the pianist Solomon was to give the first performance of the composer's new *Piano Concerto* at the World's Fair. Accepting an opportune invitation to teach at Berkeley, he returned to England in 1941 to serve as Director of Music with the BBC from 1942 until 1944. The years brought film and ballet scores, and after the war collaboration with J.B.Priestley on the opera *The Olympians*. In 1950 Bliss received a knighthood and three years later he succeeded Arnold Bax as Master of the Queen's Musick, thereafter contributing the expected ceremonial pieces demanded by his office. At the same time there was a series of major works, including a *Violin Concerto* in 1955 for Alfredo Campoli, and a *Cello Concerto* in 1970 for Mstislav Rostropovich, given its first performance under Benjamin Britten at the Aldeburgh Festival. One of his last works, commissioned for the quincentenary of St George's Chapel, Windsor, was his 1974 *Shield of Faith*, a setting of an anthology of poems that he was never to hear. It continued a genre he had explored earlier, notably in 1930 in *Morning Heroes*, an attempt to exorcise the ghosts of war. He died in March 1975.

Wounded on active service in France in 1916, Bliss was transferred once again to England and in 1917 found himself posted to Prior Park in Bath as an instructor to cadet officers. It was in Bath that a performance was arranged of his *Piano Quartet*, completed in 1915 and dedicated to his friend Lily Henkel and her quartet, published, thanks to his father and Eugene Goossens, by Novello. The first movement opens in a pastoral mood, the thematic material, with its echoes of folk-song, subjected to further development, as the movement proceeds, in a style in many ways typical of English music of the period. There is a brief and attractive *Intermezzo*, before the lively final *Allegro furioso* bursts in.

One of the players in the first performance of the

Piano Quartet, at a War Emergencies Concert in London in April 1915, was the great viola-player Lionel Tertis: it was through Tertis that Bliss was inspired, in 1933, to write a viola sonata that the composer gradually came to see rather in terms of a concerto for the instrument than as a chamber work. Tertis first played the sonata at a private gathering in May at Bliss's house at Hampstead Heath with the pianist Solomon, while William Walton turned the pages. Tertis and Solomon gave the first public performance in November at a BBC Chamber Concert, and Tertis relates how he gave a later performance for the BBC with Rubinstein, who had arrived on the morning of the recital, unperturbed by a rough crossing from the Hook of Holland. Rubinstein read the score at sight and in the evening gave an impeccable performance. The sonata makes use of the fullest possible range of the viola, offering a particular challenge in the highest register. Tertis, when asked by the violist Frederick Riddle how he managed the final ascent to the heights at the end of the *Furiant*, claimed that the Lord alone knew. Nevertheless he went on in his autobiography to explain his habit of practising such difficulties in a moth-eaten old fur coat, after which feats of this kind in the concert hall became relatively easy.

The first movement of the *Viola Sonata* makes much use of a three-note descending figure and of shifts between implied major and minor in complex and varied textures that explore the lyrical and technical possibilities of the viola. The second movement is introduced by the plucked notes of the muted viola, over sustained piano chords. A brief chordal passage leads to a melody marked *Andante poco maestoso* and *sonore*. Both elements return in the conclusion of a particularly lyrical movement. To this the *Furiant* provides an immediate contrast, impelled forward in its headlong and technically demanding course. The final *Coda* offers cadenza-like passages, first for the viola and then for the piano, bringing reminiscences of what has passed, particularly of the first movement.

Bliss met Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge in America in 1925. He greatly admired her attitude to musicians, patronage and understanding of music generally, dedicating the first of *his Two interludes* for piano to her that year. He was therefore delighted to accept her commission for the *Oboe Quintet* for her Venice Festival of 1927, and the work, inspired by the playing of Leon Goossens, was played in Venice by Goossens and the Venetian Quartet, to be repeated in Vienna, where it won the praise of Alban Berg. The violins, in thirds, open the first movement, its general serenity broken by a passage marked *Allegro assai agitato* but finally restored with the return of a secondary theme and a whispered conclusion. Melodic interest centres on the oboe in the opening of the second movement. An *Allegro moderato* brings a change of metre and mood, the opening first violin phrase echoed by the viola. Peace returns and the movement ends as it had begun. The strings unite in the forceful opening of the final *Vivace*, the melodic line taken up by the oboe. The music leads to *Connelly's Jig*, so indicated in the score, motifs from which become fragmented, mingling with the opening material of the movement, before the final oboe display with which the quintet ends.

Keith Anderson

The Maggini Quartet

Laurence Jackson - Violin I
David Angel - Violin II
Martin Outram - Viola
Michal Kaznowski - Cello

Formed in 1988, the Maggini Quartet is established as one of the finest string quartets on the international chamber music circuit, performing at major festivals and concert halls throughout Europe, the United States and the Far East. Renowned for championing British composers, the Quartet won *Gramophone Chamber Music CD of the Year* for the April 2001 release of the *String Quartets* and *Phantasy Quintet* of Vaughan Williams, part of the Gramophone Award-winning Naxos series that has brought world-wide sales of more than 100,000 discs. Other recordings for the series have also received high praise, with the CD of works by Frank Bridge attracting critical acclaim, while the recording of Elgar's *String Quartet* and *Piano Quintet* with Peter Donohoe was a 1997 winner of the Diapason d'Or, France's most prestigious award for classical music recordings, and the release of the *String Quartets* and *Trio by* E. J. Moeran proved to be one of the best selling chamber music CDs of 1998. The Maggini has also recorded all the Britten *String Quartets* for Naxos, winning praise from *Diapason* in France, while the second volume was an Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* in September 1999 and in *Classic CD* the following November. The recording of Walton's *String Quartet* and *Piano Quartet* with Peter Donohoe was nominated for a Gramophone Award, as well as being an Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* in July 2000 and in the *BBC Music Magazine* in August 2000, and the CD of Bax Quartets Nos.1 and 2 won a 2002 Cannes Classical Award. Further releases include repertoire by Bax, Bliss, Bridge, Rawsthorne, Arnold and John Ireland. The Maggini Quartet has won similar praise for other recordings and has commissioned a number of works, including Robert Simpson's last work, his *Cello Quintet*, first performed at the Cheltenham International Festival in 1996, a year which also saw the first performance of *Olivia* by Roxanna Panufnik, commissioned for the Maggini by Brunel University Arts Centre in London. The Maggini's 10th Anniversary commission was James MacMillan's *Second Quartet*, which received its world première at the Wigmore Hall in London in 1998, with subsequent performances in North America and Europe. The Maggini has embarked on an exciting collaboration with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies to perform and record his ten new *Naxos Quartets,* the first of which was premièred at the Wigmore Hall in London in October 2002. Commissioned by Naxos, the works will fulfill the composer's long-held intention of bringing a major contribution to chamber music repertoire, and the project will provide a unique opportunity for performers and composer to work together over a five-year period. The Quartet takes its name from the famous sixteenth-century Brescian violin-maker Giovanni Paulo Maggini, an example of whose work is played by David Angel.

Nicholas Daniel

Educated at Salisbury Cathedral School, the Purcell School and at the Royal Academy of Music, Nicholas Daniel studied with Janet Craxton, Celia Nicklin and George Caird. At the age of eighteen he was the winner of the BBC's prestigious Young Musician of the Year Competition, and went on to win numerous other competitions, including the International Double Reed Society competition in Graz, and the Munich International Oboe Competition, where he was the first British prize-winner. He made his début at the BBC Promenade Concerts in London 1992 when still only in his twenties, returning to appear as a soloist in subsequent years. Today, one of Britain's most distinguished

and charismatic soloists, he is also noted for his championing of new repertoire for the instrument and has recently been appointed artistic director of the Osnabruck Festival, Germany and of the Isle of Wight International Oboe Competition. Nicholas Daniel has been heard in recital on almost every continent, and has been a concerto soloist with major European orchestras in collaboration with distinguished conductors. An active chamber musician, he is a founding member of the Haffner Wind Ensemble, one of the leading wind ensembles in Britain, and has enjoyed a long collaboration with the pianist Julius Drake, with whom he has given premières of a number of important new works. He was Professor of Oboe and Conducting at the Indiana University School of Music from 1997 to 1999 and Prince Consort Lecturer of Oboe at the Royal College of Music for a three year tenure from 1999-2002, and his outstanding musical achievements have been recognised by the major London conservatories, all of which have conferred honorary awards. Nicholas Daniel can be heard on more than twenty recordings for major record companies.

Peter Donohoe

Peter Donohoe was born in Manchester and studied at the Royal Northern College and later in Paris with Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod. Since his unprecedented success as joint winner of the 1982 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, he has developed a distinguished career in Europe, the United States, the Far East and Australasia. Peter Donohoe regularly performs with major orchestras such as the London Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Boston Symphony and Chicago Symphony Orchestras. He also makes regular appearances at major festivals such as the BBC Proms, Edinburgh Festival, La Roque D'Antheron and Schleswig Holstein Music Festival. He has made many fine recordings for EMI, for which he has won awards such as the Grand Prix International du Disque Liszt and the Gramophone Concerto Award. He has also made various recordings for Chandos Records, Hyperion and Naxos.

Julian Rolton

A highly versatile musician, Julian Rolton is equally at ease as a concerto soloist, chamber musician and accompanist. He has worked with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra in Canada, performed concertos by Britten, Shostakovich and Strauss in the London South Bank Centre, and Kagel's *Phantasiestücke* with Martyn Brabbins and Sinfonia 21 in the Ars Musica Festival in Brussels, the British première of which was broadcast by the BBC. Having studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada, Julian Rolton has performed for music clubs throughout Britain and played at festivals in Cambridge, Warwick, Peterborough, Bath and Oxford. As an accompanist he has appeared in recitals and recordings, and regularly played for master classes at the Snape Maltings. He is a member of the Chagall Trio which has appeared at festivals throughout Britain, broadcasts on BBC Radio 3 and has toured the Baltic. Julian Rolton teaches at the Rudolf Steiner School, Kings Langley.

Arthur Bliss (1891-1975)
Klavierquartett · Sonate für Viola und Klavier · Oboenquintett

Arthur Bliss gehört zur der Generation englischer Komponisten, die in den Jahren zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen zu künstlerischer Reife gelangt ist. Lange Zeit war man der Ansicht, Bliss sei von der Moderne der 1920er Jahre quasi „zurück" zu einer mehr traditionellen Romantik im Stile Elgars gegangen. Erst heute, in einem neuen Jahrhundert, ist es möglich, sein Gesamtwerk aus einem anderen Blickwinkel zu sehen und objektiver einzuschätzen.

Arthur Bliss, Sohn eines Geschäftsmannes aus Neuengland, wurde im Jahre 1891 in London geboren. Seine Mutter, eine Amateurpianistin, starb sehr früh; er und seine Brüder wurden vom Vater aufgezogen. Er wurde am Rugby College und später am Pembroke College in Cambridge ausgebildet, wo er Schüler von Charles Wood war und wo er Edward Dent kennenlernte. Er verbrachte ein Jahr am Royal College of Music, bevor er sich im Jahre 1914 zum Kriegsdienst meldete. Bis zu seiner Demobilisierung im Jahre 1919 diente er in der Armee. Am Royal College war er Kommilitone von Herbert Howells, dessen Begabung er sehr bewunderte, sowie von Eugene Goossens, Ivor Gurney und Arthur Benjamin. Mit seinem Lehrer Charles Stanford verband ihn wenig Gemeinsames. Als Offizier bei den Königlichen Füsilieren und später bei den Gardegrenadieren durchlebte er die Schrecken des Stellungskrieges; er wurde verwundet, in den letzten Kriegsjahren erlitt er bei einem Gasangriff eine Vergiftung. Sein Bruder Kennard fiel im Kampf; ein schwerer Verlust für Bliss.

In den Jahren nach dem Krieg begann Bliss, sich in London einen Namen zu machen - mit Kompositionen, die nicht selten feindselige Reaktionen von seiten der konservativen Musikkritik hervorriefen. Auch im Ausland wurden seine Werke gespielt. Die Jahre 1923 und 1924 verbrachte er gemeinsam mit seinem Vater und seinem Bruder Howard in Amerika. Im Jahre 1925 heiratete er und kehrte mit seiner Frau nach England zurück, um sich wieder verstärkt dem Komponieren zu widmen.

Bliss, der sich immer wieder von hervorragenden Interpreten inspirieren ließ, ging im Sommer 1939 nach New York, wo der Pianist Solomon im Rahmen der Weltausstellung sein neues *Klavierkonzert* zur Uraufführung brachte. Er nahm eine Lehrstelle im kalifornischen Berkeley an, im Jahre 1941 ging er nach England zurück und arbeitete von 1942 bis 1944 als Leiter der Musikabteilung der BBC. In dieser Zeit komponierte er vor allem Film- und Ballettmusiken. Im Jahre 1950 wurde Bliss in den Adelsstand erhoben, drei Jahre später folgte er Arnold Bax als Master of the Queen's Musick nach. Zu den Pflichten dieses Amtes gehörte, zu bestimmten Anlässen Fest- und Huldigungsmusiken zu komponieren; er schrieb aber auch eine Reihe großer Werke, darunter im Jahre 1955 ein *Violinkonzert* für Alfredo Campoli und im Jahre 1970 ein *Violoncellokonzert* für Mstislaw Rostropowitsch. Eine seiner letzten Kompositionen war *Shield of Faith* (Der Schild des Glaubens), entstanden im Jahre 1974 für die Fünfhundertjahrfeier der St. Georgskapelle von Schloss Windsor. Die Aufführung dieses chorsinfonischen Werkes konnte er nicht mehr erleben, er starb im März 1975.

Bliss komponierte sein *Klavierquartett* im Jahre 1915 während seiner Dienstzeit bei der Armee und widmete es seiner Freundin Lily Henkel und ihrem Quartett. Sein Vater und Eugene Goossens sorgten dafür, dass das Werk bei Novello im Druck erschein. Im April 1915 wurde es in London unter kriegsbedingt schwierigen Umständen uraufgeführt, im Jahre 1917 gelang es, eine weitere Aufführung in Bath zu organisieren, wo Bliss mittlerweile als Ausbilder diente, nachdem er im Jahre 1916 bei einem Einsatz in Frankreich verwundet worden war. - Der erste Satz beginnt in einer pastoralen Stimmung, mit Themen, die zuweilen an Volkslieder erinnern. Die Art und Weise, wie das thematische Material verarbeitet wird, ist in vielerlei Hinsicht typisch für die englische Musik dieser Zeit. Ein kurzes, reizvolles *Intermezzo* schließt sich an, gefolgt von einem lebhaften *Allegro furioso*, mit dem

das Werk endet.

Einer der Mitwirkenden bei der Uraufführung des *Klavierquartetts* war der große Bratschist Lionel Tertis. Auf dessen Anregung hin begann Bliss im Jahre 1933, eine *Sonate für Viola und Klavier* zu komponieren, die allerdings mehr und mehr die Gestalt eines Konzertes für Bratsche annahm, weniger die eines kammermusikalischen Werkes. Tertis spielte die *Sonate* zum ersten Mal im Mai desselben Jahres bei einer privaten Zusammenkunft in Bliss' Haus in Hampstead Heath, gemeinsam mit dem Pianisten Solomon (dem William Walton die Noten wendete). Die erste öffentliche Aufführung fand im November des Jahres im Rahmen eines Kammerkonzertes der BBC statt, ebenfalls mit Tertis und Solomon als Interpreten. Später spielte Tertis Bliss' Werk nochmals für die BBC, nun mit Artur Rubinstein als Partner. Wie Tertis berichtet, kam Rubinstein erst am Morgen des Tages, an dem das Konzert stattfinden sollte, in London an, nach einer stürmischen Nordseeüberfahrt von Hoek van Holland aus, die ihn allerdings völlig unbeeindruckt gelassen hatte. Er spielte den Klavierpart vom Blatt, und die Aufführung am Abend war makellos. - Die *Sonate* nutzt den Tonumfang der Bratsche bis an die Grenzen aus, vor allem das Spiel im höchsten Register fordert dem Interpreten beinahe Unmögliches ab. Tertis wurde einmal von dem Bratschisten Frederick Riddle gefragt, wie er es geschafft habe, den Aufgang am Schluss des *Furiants* zu bewältigen - er antwortete, das wisse Gott allein. In seiner Autobiographie gab er schließlich doch sein „Geheimnis" preis: sehr schwierige Stellen übe er immer in einem alten, mottenzerfressenen Pelzmantel; später im Konzertsaal seien sie dann relativ leicht.

Der erste Satz der *Sonate* beruht im wesentlichen auf einer absteigenden Dreitonfigur und auf dem charakteristischen Wechsel von großer und kleiner Terz, der darin bereits vorgebildet ist. Komplex und vielfältig gestaltet, erkundet er sowohl die lyrischen als auch die technischen Möglichkeiten der Bratsche. Der zweite Satz beginnt mit gezupften Tönen der gedämpften Bratsche über gehaltenen Klavierakkorden. Eine kurze akkordische Passage führt zu einer *Andante poco maestoso e sonore* überschriebenen Melodie. Beide Elemente kehren am Schluss dieses ausgesprochen lyrischen Satzes zurück. Einen unmittelbaren Kontrast dazu bildet der *Furiant*, ein unaufhörlich vorwärts drängender und technisch höchst anspruchsvoller Satz. Die abschließende *Coda* bringt kadenzartige Passagen, zunächst für die Bratsche, dann für das Klavier, in denen Elemente der vorangegangenen Sätze, vor allem des ersten, wieder aufklingen.

Im Jahre 1925, während seines ersten Aufenthalts in Amerika, lernte Bliss Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge kennen, die wohl bedeutendste Frau unter den Musikmäzenen dieser Zeit. Er bewunderte ihre Art, wie sie mit Musikern umging, und ihr Verständnis für die Musik überhaupt. Als Ausdruck seiner Verehrung widmete er ihr das erste seiner *Zwei Interludien* für Klavier, die er im gleichen Jahr komponierte. Um so größer war seine Freude, als er von ihr den Auftrag erhielt, ein Werk für ihr Venedig-Festival 1927 zu schreiben. Er komponierte das *Oboenquintett*, das in Venedig von Leon Goossens (dessen Spielweise Bliss inspiriert hatte) und dem Venezianischen Quartett uraufgeführt wurde. Alban Berg, der das *Quintett* wenig später in Wien hörte, äußerte sich sehr anerkennend über das Werk. - Die Violinen eröffnen, in Terzen geführt, den ersten Satz. Die ruhige Heiterkeit wird von einem *Allegro assai agitato* unterbrochen, kehrt jedoch schließlich mit der Wiederaufnahme des Nebenthemas zurück. Im zweiten Satz liegt der melodische Schwerpunkt zunächst auf der Oboe. Ein *Allegro moderato* bringt einen Wechsel in Taktart und Stimmung mit sich, bevor der Satz zur Ruhe des Anfangs zurückfindet. Der Finalsatz *Vivace* beginnt kraftvoll im Unisono der Streicher. Die Oboe übernimmt die melodische Führung und leitet zu einem tänzerischen Thema über, das Bliss in der Partitur als *Connelly's Jig* bezeichnet hat. Einzelne Motive aus diesem Thema werden abgesplittert und mit dem Beginn des Satzes verschmolzen, bevor das Werk von virtuosen Figuren der Oboe beschlossen wird.

Keith Anderson
Deutsche Fassung: Tilo Kittel

Also available:

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BLISS: Chamber Music, Vol. 2

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Arthur Bliss belongs to the generation of English composers who came to maturity in the years between the two World Wars. Written in 1915, his *Piano Quartet* was dedicated to his friend Lily Henkel. It opens in a pastoral mood which develops in a style typical of English music of the period. The *Viola Sonata* was inspired by the great viola player, Lionel Tertis who took part in the première of the *Piano Quartet*. The sonata makes full use of the instrument's range, offering a particular challenge in the highest register. Inspired by another instrumentalist Leon Goossens, the *Oboe Quintet* was commissioned for the Venice Festival in 1927. Goossens, with the Venetian Quartet, gave the first performance in Venice and later in Vienna, where it won the praise of Alban Berg.

Arthur BLISS

(1891-1975)

	Piano Quartet *	**15:38**
1	Poco adagio e espressivo	8:39
2	Intermezzo: Tempo di Mazurka	1:52
3	Allegro furioso	5:03
	Sonata for Viola and Piano †	**24:25**
4	Moderato	7:00
5	Andante	8:53
6	Furiant	4:34
7	Coda	3:54
	Oboe Quintet ‡	**22:03**
8	Assai sostenuto - Allegro assai agitato	8:03
9	Andante con moto	8:13
10	Vivace	5:43

Maggini Quartet ‡

Laurence Jackson*, David Angel, Violin • Martin Outram*†, Viola • Michal Kaznowski*, Cello

Nicholas Daniel‡, Oboe • Peter Donohoe*, Julian Rolton†, Piano

This recording has been recorded and edited at 24 bit resolution.
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