

BACH • HANDEL

Arias

KATHLEEN FERRIER



1949-1952 Recordings

Kathleen Ferrier
London Philharmonic Orchestra
Jacques Orchestra and Cantata Singers
Adrian Boult • Reginald Jacques



Great Singers • Kathleen Ferrier (1912-1953)

BACH and HANDEL: Arias

'No summit of solemnity was inaccessible to her, and it was particularly music of spiritual meaning that seemed her most personal domain.' Thus wrote the distinguished conductor Bruno Walter about the contralto Kathleen Ferrier, with whom he worked closely during the later years of her life. The highly individual character of Ferrier's voice, her natural musicianship, her high level of personal professionalism, and her humorous, 'no-nonsense', Lancastrian personality contributed to make her one of England's most popular singers during her all-too-brief career, and through her many gramophone records, which handsomely reflect both her personal and professional qualities, she remains well loved throughout the world.

Kathleen Ferrier was born in 1912, in the village of Higher Walton, which lies between Blackburn and Preston, in the North West region of England. Initially she studied music as a piano pupil of Thomas Duerden, and intended to become an accompanist. When she was fourteen, she left school, as was common at the time, and took a job in the telephone exchange at Blackburn, becoming a switchboard operator in 1930. At the same time she continued with the piano, winning the first prize as well as a gold medal for her playing at the Liverpool Festival, also in 1930. Five years later she married a local bank manager, Bert Wilson. Together they moved first to Siloth and then to Carlisle in Cumberland. It was here that her husband had a bet with her that she would not enter a singing competition: she took him up and went on to win in two categories, piano and voice. As a result of this success she began to study singing seriously, first with a Dr Hutchinson in Carlisle, and later with the distinguished baritone Roy Henderson in London.

With the outbreak of war in 1939 the appetite for classical music as a diversion and solace from hostilities grew rapidly, and Ferrier was not short of work in the music-loving North of England. On the advice of Sir Malcolm Sargent she moved to London in 1942, when her career really began to take off. She made her London debut at one of Dame Myra Hess's Lunchtime Concerts in the National Gallery during December 1942. Shortly afterwards she took part in a performance of Handel's *Messiah*, in which the tenor soloist was Peter Pears.

Through Pears she met the composer Benjamin Britten, a very keen judge of his fellow musicians. Britten was sufficiently impressed to have her in mind for the title rôle of his new opera *The Rape of Lucretia*, the first performance of which took place at Glyndebourne in 1946. Britten also wrote the contralto parts in his *Spring Symphony* and canticle *Abraham and Isaac* specifically for her.

The advent of peace brought consequences which helped to establish Ferrier as an international star: air travel assisted the acceptance of engagements across continents, new cultural institutions were established such as the Edinburgh Festival, and the gramophone industry started to grow rapidly after 1948, thus helping to develop reputation. Following her success as Lucretia, Ferrier returned to Glyndebourne in 1947 to sing Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. In the autumn of 1947 she appeared at the first Edinburgh Festival with Bruno Walter, who, like Britten before him, was immediately struck by the unique power of Ferrier's singing. During January 1948 she sang in three performances of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* under Walter in New York, creating a strong impression with local critics and audiences. Already a favourite in the Netherlands, she repeated her interpretation of Orfeo there in 1949 and 1951, and returned to North America in 1949 and 1950. In addition she participated annually at the Edinburgh Festival, and sang throughout Europe, for instance with Herbert von Karajan in Vienna in performances of Bach's *B minor Mass* and *St Matthew Passion* during 1950, to mark the bi-centenary of Bach's death. At the same time Ferrier continued to sing throughout the United Kingdom. She developed an especially close relationship with Sir John Barbirolli and the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, with whom she gave notable performances of the music of Mahler and Elgar, as well as much else.

Following a brief foray with EMI and specifically its Columbia label and chief producer Walter Legge, in 1946 Ferrier signed a contract with the thrusting young Decca Record Company, which initiated a regular programme of recordings featuring its new star. These included *Das Lied*

von der Erde with Walter, recorded in Vienna in 1952 and unquestionably one of the great post-war recordings (available on Naxos 8.110871). By 1952 the onset of breast and secondary cancers was diagnosed. During February 1953 Ferrier sang in a specially mounted production of *Orfeo* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, with Barbirolli conducting. At the second performance a bone in her leg, weakened by the cancer, broke. Ferrier managed to complete the performance but left the theatre on a stretcher. It was to be her last performance. She died on 8th October 1953, aged only 41.

The plangent tone of Ferrier's voice may be partly explained by her exceptionally wide throat. In addition to this unique aspect she was able to use her voice with great musicality and expressiveness. She was at her finest in music that called for 'classical dignity', in the words of the critic Neville Cardus. She brought breadth, nobility and deep emotional commitment to the music of composers such as Bach and Handel, appealing immediately to the war-weary audiences of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Decca's recording of Bach's *Cantata No. 11, Praise our God*, was made in the autumn of 1949, in time for the following year's bicentennial commemoration of the composer's death in 1750. Decca engaged Dr Reginald Jacques to conduct both this work and the *Cantata No. 67, Hold in affection Jesus Christ*, with the same forces. Ferrier sang frequently with Jacques (1894-1969), the founder of the Bach Choir, most notably her first London performance of Handel's *Messiah*. The recordings were made in Kingsway Hall, and although Ferrier had recently recorded Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* there with Columbia using

early tape recorders, Decca chose to use the older method of recording directly onto 78-rpm wax masters. The long-playing versions of these works, with the 78-rpm recordings dubbed directly onto 33 1/3-rpm masters, were issued first, in June 1950, with the 78-rpm version of *Cantata No. 11* not appearing until March 1951. Close comparison shows that the LP and 78-rpm versions use different takes, in some case with different performances. For instance the 78-rpm version of *Ah, tarry yet, my dearest Saviour* omits the aria's middle section.

The LP disc of arias by Bach and Handel, recorded in October 1952 with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult and the young John Culshaw producing, was Ferrier's last recording for Decca. All the Handel arias are unique in her discography. She had long wanted to record *Messiah* with Decca, and a complete recording had been promised to her as an incentive to sign her contract with the company. When in fact Decca did tackle this work, in 1953 with Boult conducting, it was sadly too late. *All is fulfilled*, from Bach's *St John Passion*, is similarly Ferrier's only recorded account of this aria, from a work which she sang infrequently. During the 1960s and 1970s these recordings were available with the orchestral accompaniments re-recorded by the same forces in stereo, an arrangement which adjusted the sound of Ferrier's voice. The original mono versions, as used here, were re-introduced into the catalogue in 1985 on CD and during the following year for LP and cassette.

David Patmore

Producer's Note

The sources for the present transfers were LPs, a British pressing for the arias album with Boult, and a Dutch pressing for the Cantata. In 1960, the arias album was overdubbed with a new stereo accompaniment by the original conductor and orchestra, which is the way it has been available in most of the years since. Here, the undoctored original 1952 monaural recording has been used.

The *Cantata* (whose contralto aria was an early version, in a different key, of the *Agnus Dei* from the *B Minor Mass*) has been pitched incorrectly low in all prior LP releases. I have corrected this for its first CD appearance here.

Mark Obert-Thorn

Great Singers • Kathleen Ferrier (1912-1953)

J. S. BACH:		J. S. BACH: Cantata No. 11, "Praise our God"	
Mass in B minor, BWV 232:		<i>(Lobet Gott in seinem Reichen, BWV 11)</i>	
1	No. 10: Qui sedes	5:47	
St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244:			
2	Part 1, No. 10: Grief for sin (<i>Buß und Reu</i>)	6:07	9 Praise our God who reigns in heaven 5:39 <i>(Chorus)</i>
St. John Passion, BWV 245:			10 Then Jesus lifted His hands to heaven 0:41 <i>(Recitative – Tenor)</i>
3	Part 2, No. 30:		11 My Saviour, is the parting hour so near? 1:10 <i>(Recitative – Bass)</i>
	All is fulfilled (<i>Es ist vollbracht!</i>)	5:24	12 Ah, tarry yet, my dearest Saviour 7:28 <i>(Aria – Contralto)</i>
Mass in B minor, BWV 232:			13 And behold He rose from the midst 0:32 <i>(Recitative – Tenor)</i>
4	No. 26: Agnus Dei	5:44	14 Now at Thy feet creation lies 1:49 <i>(Chorale)</i>
HANDEL			15 And while they looked steadfastly into heaven 1:14 <i>(Recitative – Tenor / Duet – Tenor and Bass)</i>
Samson, HWV 57:			16 Ah Lord, now quickly come again 0:33 <i>(Recitative – Contralto)</i>
5	Part 1, No. 4: Return, O God of Hosts	4:31	17 Jesus, all Thy loving kindness 2:41 <i>(Aria – Soprano)</i>
Messiah, HWV 56:			18 When will the night be over? 4:08 <i>(Chorus)</i>
6	Part 1, No. 9:		
	O Thou, that tellest good tidings to Zion	5:42	
Judas Maccabaeus, HWV 63:			
7	Part 3, No. 1: Father of Heaven	7:55	
Messiah, HWV 56:			
8	Part 2, No. 23: He was despised	6:45	
Kathleen Ferrier, <i>contralto</i>			
Michael Dobson, <i>oboe d'amore</i> (track 1)			
Ambrose Gauntlet, <i>viola da gamba</i> (track 3)			
Basil Lam, <i>harpsichord continuo</i>			
London Philharmonic Orchestra • Adrian Boult			
Recorded on 7th (tracks 1-4) and 8th October (tracks 5-8), 1952, in Kingsway Hall, London			
Matrix nos.: AR 17228 through 17238			
First issued on Decca LXT 2757			
Ena Mitchell, <i>soprano</i>			
Kathleen Ferrier, <i>contralto</i>			
William Herbert, <i>tenor</i>			
William Parsons, <i>bass</i>			
Thornton Lofthouse, <i>harpsichord continuo</i>			
Cantata Singers			
Jacques Orchestra • Reginald Jacques			
Recorded on 6th October (tracks 9-11 and 18), 1st November (tracks 13-17) and 3rd November (track 12), 1949, in Kingsway Hall, London			
Matrix nos.: DRL 258 and 259			
First issued on Decca LX 3006			

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Playing
Time
73:49

BACH • HANDEL: Arias

Kathleen Ferrier (1912-1953)

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1	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750): Mass in B minor, BWV 232: No. 10: Qui sedes *	5:47
2	St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244: Part 1, No. 10: Grief for sin (<i>Buß und Reu</i>)	6:07
3	St. John Passion, BWV 245: Part 2, No. 30: All is fulfilled (<i>Es ist vollbracht!</i>) **	5:24
4	Mass in B minor, BWV 232: No. 26: Agnus Dei	5:44
5	George Frederic Handel (1685-1759) Samson, HWV 57: Part 1, No. 4: Return, O God of Hosts	4:31
6	Messiah, HWV 56: Part 1, No. 9: O Thou, that tellest good tidings to Zion	5:42
7	Judas Maccabaeus, HWV 63: Part 3, No. 1: Father of Heaven	7:55
8	Messiah, HWV 56: Part 2, No. 23: He was despised	6:45
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9-18	Johann Sebastian Bach: Cantata No. 11, "Praise our God" (<i>Lobet Gott in seinem Reichen, BWV 11</i>)	25:45
	Kathleen Ferrier, contralto • Ena Mitchell, soprano William Herbert, tenor • William Parsons, bass Thornton Lofthouse, harpsichord continuo Cantata Singers Jacques Orchestra • Reginald Jacques Recorded 6th October (tracks 9-11 and 18), 1st November (tracks 13-17) and 3rd November (track 12), 1949 in Kingsway Hall, London	

'No summit of solemnity was inaccessible to her, and it was particularly music of spiritual meaning that seemed her most personal domain.' Thus wrote the distinguished conductor Bruno Walter about the contralto Kathleen Ferrier, whose highly individual, plangent voice, natural musicianship and high level of personal professionalism made her one of England's most popular singers during her all-too-brief career. This disc compiles a large number of her recordings of arias by Bach and Handel, to whose music she brought breadth, nobility and deep emotional commitment. She is accompanied by Sir Adrian Boult and Reginald Jacques, both major figures in England's post-war musical life. The *Cantata* recording appears on CD for the first time.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
Cover image: Kathleen Ferrier (Private Collection)

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