

## *SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1338*

### *Christopher Bunting plays Bach – Four Cello Suites*

*Bach wrote six works each for solo violin and for solo violoncello. Probably all were written soon after he moved from Weimar to Köthen, from organ and church composition to orchestra and chamber works. The three sonatas and three suites for violin are of four to eight movements each, mainly dance forms, but there are also others, notably three fugues. The 'cello suites, however, are all of six dance movements. They were written for the Court 'cellist Christian Bernhard Linigke.*

*At the beginning of the twentieth century a few movements from the violin works were played, often as encores, notably the prelude from the last partita, but the 'cello suites were “regarded as works of academic interest” (Grove). However, in 1909 Casals began to play the complete suites regularly in concerts and from his pioneering work they are now accepted as the finest works for their instrument. There are now at least fifteen editions and many recordings bearing witness to a variety of interpretations.*

*Ernest Ansermet, the Swiss conductor and philosopher, expressed the feeling that “all music aspires to the dominant”. This undercurrent is felt throughout the suites, coupled with the tonic–orientating ‘pull’ beginning after the double bar.*

*An interviewer once had the temerity to ask Sir Thomas Beecham to describe what was meant by great music. “Great music” came the reply in a flash, “is that which enters the ear with facility and leaves it only with difficulty.” These works, are examples of Bach’s unparalleled mastery of counterpoint and they are great music.*

CHRISTOPHER BUNTING was a Londoner and was educated at Westminster School. His father was a civil engineer working mainly in India, but when in England he could go to any opera and, on returning home, play through most of it on the piano. Christopher Bunting's mother was a 'cellist, pianist, singer and organist. She was an amateur, though educated at the Royal Academy of Music. His brother was a gifted violinist, but at 19 he was killed in a road accident.

Bunting started to learn piano at five and cello at six. After first lessons with his mother, he remembered being taught by a Mrs. Gibb. When the war came he was evacuated to Porlock in Somerset and instruction ceased, but for an occasional trip to Bristol for a lesson with Ivor James.

He was successively in the Home Guard, the Royal Observer Corps and the Air Training Corps. Both his parents died around this time. He was then in the Royal Norfolk Regiment and he was posted to the "Stars in Battle-Dress" unit. His colleagues there included the cellist William Pleeth.

He abandoned engineering studies at Bristol University in favour of a music degree at Cambridge, where he graduated in 1947.

Bunting studied with Maurice Eisenberg for some years, both in New Jersey and whenever he visited England. Eisenberg was a great follower of Casals, and with his preparation Bunting was able to take up a scholarship to study with Casals in 1952 at Prades. The levels of detailed analysis and musical insight required by Casals bore fruit in both Bunting's playing and, later, his teaching. He was invited by Casals to play in the Festival orchestra. The other cellists were Paul and Maude Tortelier, and Nelson Cooke. He remembered particularly Casals recording the Schumann concerto.

Bunting's debut was in 1952 at the Wigmore Hall with Gerald Moore. The programme included Brahms' F major sonata, Beethoven's A major sonata, Debussy's sonata and Bach's first 'cello suite.

As Bunting's career developed he travelled all over Europe and to Australia, the United States and Asia. In Germany *Der Abend* commented that, "The nobility of his pure tone, the dexterity of his left hand and the elegant bowing remind one of Casals". Bunting especially enjoyed working with Sir John Barbirolli, Sir Adrian Boult, Sir Andrew Davis, John Hollingsworth, Sir Malcolm Sargent and Rudolf Schwarz, and he studied conducting with Sir Adrian.

He passed very pleasant evenings playing with Arthur Grumiaux and as a member of a quartet led by Mischa Elman with Emmanuel Hurwitz as second violin.

Amongst first performances Bunting gave are those of Gerald Finzi's concerto with the Hallé Orchestra under Barbirolli at the Cheltenham Festival in 1955; Alan Rawsthorne's concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Sargent in 1967; and four works by Francis Routh.

His was a composer, too, his works including *Three Pieces for Cello Ensemble*, *Fugue for Six Cellos*, *Elegy for Violincello and Piano* and a concerto of which he gave the first performance at St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden in 1984.

Throughout his career Bunting taught. He taught students to practice efficiently, including how to benefit from their mistakes. He passed on to his students bowings and fingerings he had learnt from Casals. The object was always technical mastery as a tool of music. He was a visiting professor at the Yehudi Menuhin School, the Royal College of Music and at various international workshops, for many years he was invited annually to give master classes in Holland and generations of children benefited from his abilities as an orchestral trainer.

His publications include: *Essay on the Craft of 'Cello Playing* [C.U.P. 1982]; and various 'Cello studies [C.U.P. and O.U.P.]. They have been taken up with enthusiasm by players at all levels.

He was also a fine pianist. He often accompanied his students and the BBC once broadcast a Brahms sonata in which he played both cello and piano parts.

Unfortunately a spinal problem forced Christopher Bunting to retire. However he was not idle; students now gained from his enormous experience, he was President of the British branch of the European String Teachers Association and also of the Bristol Music Club, a post, he declared with pride, once held by Joseph Joachim.

In 2000 he was awarded the M.B.E. for services to music.

Christopher Bunting was born in 1924 and he died in 2005.

Throughout his career Christopher Bunting studied and played the Bach suites. Thus, no longer able to play them, he felt it appropriate that these recordings, which he had made privately in the 1960s, should be released.

Acknowledgements: Symposium Records thanks Paul Lewis for assistance with the production.

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