

**John
GARDNER**
Piano Concerto No. 1
Symphony No. 1 • Midsummer Ale
Peter Donohoe, Piano
Royal Scottish National Orchestra
David Lloyd-Jones



John Gardner (b.1917): Midsummer Ale, Op. 72
Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat major, Op. 34 • Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op. 2



John Gardner c.1957

The neglect suffered by John Gardner's considerable musical output is both surprising and hard to understand. With his opus numbers having reached 249 he has composed an enormous amount of music for every conceivable combination of forces, including operas, symphonies, concertos, choral works, church music, and chamber works. His best known composition is *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*, which is available on more than thirty CDs and is one of the most popular modern Christmas carols. Beyond that, whilst his work has been widely performed over the years, very little of it has found its way into the recorded music catalogue.

John Gardner's birth in Manchester on 2nd March 1917 has led some to assume that he is a "Manchester composer", but it was simply the result of a fluke of family circumstances. He was in fact brought up in

Ilfracombe in North Devon, where his paternal family had practised medicine for three generations. His grandfather John Twiname and his father Alfred Linton both wrote music. John Twiname Gardner had had a number of pieces of parlour music published, some of which are still occasionally performed and recorded.

Musical talent was evident at an early age. He went to Eagle House, Sandhurst, from where he progressed to Wellington College with a music scholarship, and thence to Exeter College, Oxford as Organ Scholar. The Eagle House archives reveal that he opened the school concert in December 1928 playing Roger Quilter's *Children's Overture*. At Wellington his musical contemporaries included the composer John Addison, the conductor and scholar (Sir) Anthony Lewis, and the performer, composer and longtime Secretary of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, Philip Cranmer. The school records show that in 1932 Addison and Gardner competed for their house in the "Dormitory Music Cup", playing Gardner's *Rondo for two pianos* but their house came second to Cranmer's. The same year Gardner is noted as having performed the first movement of Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No. 2* with the school orchestra, whilst Anthony Lewis played the last movement (one T.J. Hetherington played the middle movement).

At Oxford he was taught by, amongst others, R.O. Morris, whom he remembers seemed bored by teaching him as he "always had a train to catch". His contemporaries, who included the composer Geoffrey Bush, were envious of the fluency of his writing, and as World War II grew close he was beginning to make his mark as a composer. He was introduced to Hubert Foss, who had started the Oxford University Press music department, and the Australian composer Arthur Benjamin frequently offered advice and encouragement. His *Intermezzo for Organ* was published by Oxford University Press in 1934, his *Rhapsody for Oboe and String Quartet* was performed at the Wigmore Hall in 1935, and a delightful *Serenade for Oboe, Piano and*

String Orchestra was performed by George Malcolm at Exeter College in 1937. The Blech Quartet took his *String Quartet No. 1 in G minor* to Paris, where it was broadcast on French Radio in May 1939, and OUP published the anthem *Holy Son of God Most High*. In 1937 he had become one of the first composers to write for the new medium of television, being commissioned by the BBC to write two ballets and two cabaret songs.

On leaving University John Gardner briefly taught music at Repton School, where John Veale was one of his pupils, but then the War effectively put a stop to his career and he joined the RAF. He worked as dance-band pianist and as bandmaster of the Fighter Command Band before joining Transport Command as a navigator. On demobilisation he joined the Royal Opera House as a répétiteur (1946-52). In the following years he held a number of long-standing part-time teaching posts, including that of Director of Music at St Paul's Girls' School, Director of Music at Morley College and professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music. He was a Director of the Performing Right Society from 1965 to 1987 (and latterly its Deputy Chairman) and was made a C.B.E. in 1976. He has composed throughout his life and his latest work, written in 2004, is a *Concerto for Bassoon and Strings*, Op. 249.

The war had largely frustrated Gardner's compositional ambitions and on demobilisation he finally began to work on a major work – the *Symphony No. 1 in D minor*, Op. 2. He withdrew his pre-war works and started numbering again from Opus 1, feeling that it was time for a fresh start. The symphony was completed in the summer of 1947, but was not performed until 1951, when Barbirolli introduced it at the Cheltenham Festival in a version which had been slightly amended from the original, at Barbirolli's suggestion. It was dedicated to Gardner's Opera House colleague Reginald Goodall and enjoyed many performances and broadcasts in the next twenty years or so.

The success of this performance would lead to a string of commissions which began in 1951, allowed him to become “a composer” and continued throughout his working life. For Gardner, therefore, the symphony

is a rare example of a work which simply had to be written rather than written to order. It is expansive both in length and scoring (triple woodwind). Despite the “new start” the symphony re-uses much material from Gardner's pre-war catalogue. Examples include the opening of the first movement (up to bar 34 when there is a quiet A major chord in the brass before a tempo change) which was a short piano piece (now lost) dating from 1939 or 1940. The opening of the finale is based on the finale of the *String Quartet No. 1 in G minor* (1938), which in turn was a revision of an earlier piece which had been written for a competition. It is clearly based on the thematic kernel from the opening of the first movement, but it has been transformed into something more urgent and even aggressive.

Although a lot of Gardner's later orchestral works explore traditional structures such as sonata form, the *First Symphony* is harder to pin down. To listen to the symphony is to go on a journey, but the themes are tightly integrated and in a constant state of development and transition, and this is what gives the work its cohesion and drives it towards its triumphant final D major chord. A more detailed analysis by Paul Conway can be found on the internet at <http://www.musicweb-international.com/gardner/symphonies.html>.

The *Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat*, Op. 34, was the last of Gardner's works to be given its première by John Barbirolli. The first performance was at the Cheltenham Festival in July 1957. The pianist was Cyril Preedy, who was thought to have a great career ahead of him, but who died in 1965 at the age of 45. The lack-lustre first performance more or less put paid to the work. It was revived once in 1965 by Malcolm Binns with Adrian Boult and the London Philharmonic, but apart from that, has lain dormant until the present recording.

The concerto was completed in 1956 and was dedicated to Alfred Blundell, who commissioned the work. Blundell was an old Wellingtonian who was not a musician, but enjoyed being responsible for the creation of new pieces of music. It is scored for double woodwind, brass without trombones and tuba, two percussion players and strings.

The first movement follows the classical symphonic pattern, but does not include the extended exposition and solo cadenza typical of the classical concerto. The second movement opens with a sixteen-bar theme which is developed and briefly reprised before being the subject of four variations. These lead back into a reprise of the theme and a cadenza in which the piano is joined by a number of other instruments. This passes straight into the rondo finale, the main theme of which is related to the variation theme.

Gardner generally prefers his music to stand on its own feet and rarely does he provide detailed programme notes. Thus for the overture *Midsummer Ale*, Op. 73, written in 1965 for the Morley College Orchestra, he said “Debussy and Joan Last must be the only composers who never found the naming of pieces one hell of a chore. I spent longer searching for the title of this piece than in writing down its notes on a five-line stave. The commission, from the Friends of Morley, for a piece to assist in the celebration of the College’s 75th Birthday in 1965, suggested something light and gay and, as the original intention was to perform it at a concert on 29th

June [which was cancelled, the first performance actually being on 9th November 1965], the idea of a summer party came to my mind. I decided, however, at first to call it *Academic Festival Overture* until I realised that that title had already been used in connexion with a bean-feast in Breslau in 1879. Eventually a perusal of *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (a must for all composers in searching for titles) threw up the expression ‘Midsummer Ale’, which uses the word ‘ale’ in a sense it has now lost: that of a feast or celebration at which, naturally, a lot of ale was drunk.”

The melodies in this boisterous and bacchanalian piece swing through an ever-changing array of duple and compound time signatures. This is characteristic of Gardner’s music and exemplified by the ever popular *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*, but in *Midsummer Ale* it reaches new heights of inebriation. It is a classic piece of light music and the melodies are delightfully catchy. Once heard they are difficult to get out of one’s head.

Chris Gardner



Peter Donohoe

Peter Donohoe was born in Manchester in 1953 and studied at the Royal Northern College of Music with Derek Wyndham, and then in Paris with Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod. Since his unprecedented success at the 1982 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, he has developed a distinguished career in Europe, the United States, the Far East and Australasia. His orchestral appearances have included collaboration with all the major London orchestras, with Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, Vienna Symphony and Czech Philharmonic Orchestras. He has performed regularly at the BBC Promenade Concerts in London and at the Edinburgh Festival as well as many other major festivals in Europe. Peter Donohoe has made a number of recordings, winning critical praise and awards that have included the Grand Prix International du Disque Liszt and the Gramophone Concerto Award. His best-selling recording of Elgar’s *Piano Quintet* (8.553737) is one of his significant earlier collaborations with Naxos.

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, and subsequently known as the Scottish National Orchestra before being granted the title Royal at its centenary celebrations in 1991, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra is one of Europe's leading ensembles. Distinguished conductors who have contributed to the success of the orchestra include Sir John Barbiroli, Karl Rankl, Hans Swarowsky, Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Bryden Thomson, Neeme Järvi, now Conductor Laureate, and Walter Weller who is now Conductor Emeritus. Alexander Lazarev, who served as Principal Conductor from 1997 to 2005, was recently appointed Conductor Emeritus. Stéphane Denève was appointed Music Director in 2005 and his first Naxos recording, which couples Roussel's *Symphony No. 3* with the complete ballet *Bacchus et Ariane* (8.570245) was released in May 2007. The orchestra made an important contribution to the authoritative Naxos series of Bruckner Symphonies under the late Georg Tintner, and recorded a complete cycle of the orchestral works of Samuel Barber under former Principal Guest Conductor Marin Alsop. The orchestra performs a busy schedule of concerts across Scotland with annual appearances at the Edinburgh International Festival and regular performances in the BBC Promenade Concerts in London.

David Lloyd-Jones

David Lloyd-Jones began his professional career in 1959 on the music staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and soon became much in demand as a freelance conductor for orchestral and choral concerts, opera, BBC broadcasts and TV studio opera productions. He has appeared at the Royal Opera House (*Boris Godunov* with both Christoff and Ghiaurov), Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and the Wexford, Cheltenham, Edinburgh and Leeds Festivals, and with the major British orchestras. In 1972 he was appointed Assistant Music Director at English National Opera, and during his time there conducted an extensive repertoire which included, in addition to all the standard operas, *Die Meistersinger*, *Katya Kabanova*, and the British stage première of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. In 1978, at the invitation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, he founded a new full-time opera company, Opera North, with its own orchestra, the English Northern Philharmonia, of which he became Artistic Director and Principal Conductor. During his twelve seasons with the company he conducted fifty new productions, including *The Trojans*, *Prince Igor*, *The Midsummer Marriage* (Tippett), and the British stage première of Strauss's *Daphne*. He also conducted numerous orchestral concerts, including festival appearances in France and Germany. He has made many successful recordings of British and Russian music, and has an extensive career in the concert-hall and opera-house that takes him to leading musical centres throughout Central Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Israel, Australia, Japan, Canada and the Americas. His highly acclaimed and award winning cycle of Bax's symphonies and tone poems for Naxos was completed in the autumn of 2003. In 2007 he was given the rare distinction of being made an Honorary Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society.

British Piano Concerto Foundation

Britain shares with the United States an extraordinary willingness to welcome and embrace the traditions of foreign cultures. Our countries comprise the world's two greatest 'melting pots', and, as a result, the artistic appreciation of our people has been possibly the most catholic and least nepotistic in the world. This tradition is one that we may be extremely proud of. In the case of music, it is certainly one of the reasons for my own initial inspiration to become a musician and to embrace as many different styles and periods as reasonably possible in one lifetime.

Perhaps as a result of this very enviable virtue, however, we do have a tendency to underrate the artistic traditions of our own wonderful culture. As far as music is concerned there are of course many exceptions; one thinks immediately of the operas of Benjamin Britten, the symphonic and choral works of Elgar and Vaughan Williams, as well as the leading rôle Britain has played in new music since the 1960s. Of these achievements we are rightly proud. The British piano concerto and solo piano music however, of which there is a vast array, has been largely ignored, particularly over the last thirty years.

The role and aim of the British Piano Concerto Foundation is to try to expand and explore this hugely rich and varied repertoire. It is not to exploit a musical 'curiosity corner'. It is not merely to fill a gap in the 'market place' by promoting public performances and recordings of less important music. It is to make the international musical community more aware of the true greatness of much of this repertoire.

The commitment of Naxos to this artistic cause is a source of huge inspiration to those of us involved in the BPCF, and a reason to be optimistic about the future of recorded music at a time when there is so much pessimism.

I am sure that those administrators, listeners and performers who shape the world of music will agree that some of this music is amongst the most original and fascinating, not only of the twentieth century, but also of previous ones.

It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I am associated with this project, and I look forward to continuing for whatever time I have left to explore the wonderful music of my own country.

Peter Donohoe



The English composer John Gardner has been largely neglected, in spite of his prolific output. His career began with great promise before the war, to be resumed gradually afterwards, but seldom with the success he seemed to deserve. This recording should help to re-establish his reputation with two relatively early works written in the post-war years, the *Symphony No. 1*, "a superbly crafted work... by a subtle and imaginative orchestrator" (Paul Conway/Musicweb-International) and the *Piano Concerto No. 1*, both premièred by Barbirolli. The *Piano Concerto* here receives only its third performance. *Midsummer Ale* is a classic piece of British light music with delightfully catchy melodies.

WORLD PREMIERE
RECORDINGS

John
GARDNER
(b.1917)



British Piano
Concerto
Foundation

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|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | Overture: Midsummer Ale, Op. 73 | 5:28 |
| | Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat major, Op. 34 | 25:39 |
| 2 | I Allegro con brio | 9:04 |
| 3 | II Tema con Variazioni | 9:52 |
| 4 | III Finale: Rondo | 6:43 |
| | Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op. 2 | 40:47 |
| 5 | I Lento e Grave | 11:57 |
| 6 | II Scherzo-Allegro | 6:22 |
| 7 | III Lento | 11:56 |
| 8 | IV Finale: Allegro molto | 10:32 |

Peter Donohoe, Piano
Royal Scottish National Orchestra • David Lloyd-Jones

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