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**NAXOS**

# **The Malcolm Smith Memorial Album**

**HANDEL • HOLLOWAY • HOWARD • MATTHEW-WALKER • SEARLE**

**Works for Piano**

**John Lill • Leslie Howard • Mark Bebbington • Julian Jacobson**

## The Malcolm Smith Album

Holloway • Howard • Matthew-Walker • Handel • Searle

This recording has come about as a result of a bequest by the late John Malcolm Smith (1932-2011), known universally in the world of classical music in the United Kingdom by his middle name. Malcolm was for many years head of Promotion and the Hire Library of Boosey & Hawkes Ltd, and a stalwart of many musical organisations and Festivals. He was a personal friend of many great composers, including Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams, Britten and Bernstein, and of many performing musicians whose early careers he helped, often behind the scenes. Malcolm was a tireless advocate of British music; a life member of the Royal Philharmonic Society, patron of the Bantock Society and vice-President of the British Music Society. He was chairman of the LSO club for many years, attended every Three Choirs Festival from 1954 and was a familiar and popular figure in London's musical life; his 'May I help you?' on answering the telephone endeared him to many.

Extraordinary things happened to Malcolm without his prompting: he was asked by Arthur Miller to escort Marilyn Monroe to a performance in London of *Waiting for Godot* in August 1955 – 'God knows what she thought of it!' Malcolm said; whilst serving in the RAF in 1952 he appeared in the Alec Guinness/Jack Hawkins film *The Malta Story*, in one scene helping Guinness into an aeroplane cockpit and wishing him well; and some years before, Malcolm had struck up a friendship with Anna Mahler, the composer's daughter, during a train journey in post-war Germany and Austria, a friendship which lasted until her death in London in 1988.

Malcolm's retirement party from Boosey & Hawkes in 1997 is still remembered by those who survived it, and his retirement was commemorated in a short piece for six hands at one piano by the distinguished composer Robin Holloway, whose music was published by the firm and who was also a personal friend of Malcolm's. Holloway's *Grand Heroical March* moves at a somewhat stately pace, as did its dedicatee, quoting from some of Malcolm's favourite works – Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, Delius's *Appalachia*

and Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, in particular: there may be other affectionate allusions in this musical picture post-card which are not quite so readily identifiable.

Malcolm Smith died in 2011 after a short illness, and bequeathed a sum of money to facilitate a commercial recording of Holloway's *Grand Heroical March*, with a suggestion that it be performed by three of the pianists who were regular attendees of Malcolm's ROMEO gatherings (an acronym of 'Retired Old Musicians Eating Out'). Those 'ROMEOs' arose from that retirement party, following a suggestion by friends who felt the goodwill shown on that occasion should be continued in quarterly lunch meetings in London – a tradition which lives on.

Malcolm also requested that each of the three pianists should perform a work by a British composer, preferably a piece which had either not been recorded before or had remained unrecorded for many years. The choice was left to the individual pianists, but of the three who play Holloway's piece, the very full commitments in John Lill's concert diary meant that he was unable to prepare a British solo piano piece for the recording in good time. Julian Jacobson, another friend of Malcolm's, agreed to step in, choosing Humphrey Searle's *Piano Sonata* to complete the recording.

Leslie Howard is probably best-known amongst the general musical public as a considerable piano virtuoso, having accomplished the extraordinarily unique feat of recording for Hyperion the complete music for piano by Franz Liszt, on 99 CDs, including seventeen works for piano and orchestra, a project which was accomplished over fourteen years, during which time he was awarded no fewer than six Grands Prix du Disque and an entry in the *Guinness Book of Records*. Howard has recorded much diverse music for other labels, including Deutsche Grammophon, EMI, Nimbus, Melba and Merlin; he is also a conductor (directing a bicentenary performance in 2011 of Liszt's oratorio *Christus* from memory) and an accomplished oboist, having performed Mozart's *Oboe Concerto* in Australia.

Howard's *Ruddigore Fantasy* of 2005 was commissioned by John Farmer for Ruth Ann Galatas, and was first performed by the composer in London at a Royal Brompton Hospital charity concert on 5th November, 2005. The title is styled in homage to the early operatic fantasies of Liszt, and is conceived as a continuous suite incorporating variations and transcriptions of several themes from Sullivan's marvellous *Ruddigore – or The Witch's Curse*, an opera which Malcolm Smith rated highly. The piece begins with the first part of the *Chorus of Ancestors*, outlining the aforementioned curse, and continues with the mighty *When the night wind howls in the chimney crows*. Ruth's song from the Act 1 finale and part of the Bridesmaid's chorus lead to the theme in 9/8 that ends the first act (and the whole opera, in the revised version), followed by a daredevil elaboration of the pater-trio from Act 2: *My eyes are fully open* with its celebrated reiterations of '*it really doesn't matter, matter, matter, matter, matter*'. A nod to the earlier 'night wind' brings the piece to a happy end.

My *Fantasy-Sonata: Hamlet* was commissioned by Rhonda Gillespie for her recital at the 1980 Buxton Festival, which that year had a Shakespearean theme. The *Sonata* is not a programmatic work in the generally accepted sense of the term, nor is it wholly an attempt at a character-portrait. Although the emotional content is clear, and the work is full of broad, dramatic gestures, the *Sonata* is also, in so far as any piece of music can be, a metaphysical work in which certain events occur causing changes of quite distinctive character, and yet which, at a deeper level, are joined (rather than unified) by a constant pulse and its multiples, and by a linking tonal thread. Further than this I am not prepared to say, but in the course of the *Sonata's* continuous journey the work proceeds through five sections, or moods, prefaced by a slow improvisatory introduction. A fiery *allegro* leads to a very fast yet very quiet *scherzando* section, full of incessant irregular triplets. This leads to a very dramatic middle section, literally full of overtones, both obsessive and wild, which melts into an extended nocturne, being the first moment of calm and repose in the *Sonata*. This comes to an end without being entirely resolved, before a coda, in which an aleatoric line in the right hand muses over aspects of the original material against a steady tolling in the left. The

*Sonata* ends quietly, with the faint hint of an unanswered question. The *Sonata* is dedicated to Hans Keller.

Leslie Howard's Handel transcription is included as a specific and fond tribute to Malcolm, who certainly knew his Handel. It was made in 2010 for Tristan Patrick Lee, and first performed by Howard on 23rd May, 2010 at the Bulawayo Festival in Zimbabwe. It joins the two sections of the aria, eliminating the intervening chorus, and simply recounts one of Handel's loveliest and most solemn musical utterances.

Leslie Howard's commitment to the music of Liszt is not confined to his public performances and recordings of the composer's music. He has edited – most recently a definitive edition of Liszt's *Sonata in B minor* – and written extensively on Liszt and his music. He is President of the Liszt Society, the longest continuously-running Liszt society in the world, which was founded in 1950 by the British composer Humphrey Searle, who enlisted the support of William Walton, Constant Lambert and Sacheverell Sitwell. Searle was one of the first British composers to adopt the twelve-tone technique evolved by Arnold Schoenberg; he had studied in Vienna before World War II with Anton Webern, who, with Alban Berg, was one of Schoenberg's two most famous pupils. As an intriguing aside, as a serving British army officer in Berlin in 1945, Searle was tasked with translating the will of Josef Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda, following his suicide, and whilst in Berlin, Searle learned of the death of Webern, shot by a American soldier for breaking a curfew.

1951 marked the 140th anniversary of Liszt's birth, and members of the newly-formed Liszt Society, together with other concert-goers, heard the first performance of Searle's *Piano Sonata* at London's Wigmore Hall, composed 'for the 140th birthday of Franz Liszt, 22 October 1951' and premiered by the Australian-born pianist Gordon Watson – from memory – on that day, concluding a demanding programme that began with Liszt's *Twelve Transcendental Studies*. Searle's impressive score unites two important aspects of the composer's compositional approach: structurally, it owes much to Liszt's *Sonata* of 1853, and utilises Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. Schoenberg himself had died at his home in Los Angeles three months before.

In such company, the *Sonata* made a strong impression, *The Times* noting the work's affinity, in terms of design, 'to Liszt's B minor work, and a part of its impulse to the memory of Schoenberg, Lambert and Cecil Gray [both of whom – Gray a noted British writer on music – had also recently died]', going on to say that 'its impact is quite individual, suffused with darkling, elegiac poetry and commanding thought'. Those who know Liszt's *Sonata* intimately may recognise various subtle allusions in this homage to a great composer's masterpiece.

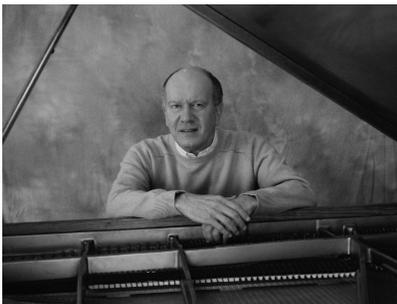
Watson recorded the *Sonata* soon afterwards for the newly-formed independent Argo label, but that early long-playing record was soon deleted. Julian Jacobson's new recording is therefore only the second this elusive

masterwork has received in over sixty years, fulfilling Malcolm Smith's wishes of bringing to the public music which, as a vice-President of the British Music Society, he felt deserved to be represented on disc and which his generous bequest has made possible.

**Robert Matthew-Walker**

Quotation from *Der Rosenkavalier, Op. 59* by Richard Strauss  
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## John Lill



John Lill's concert career spans over 55 years. He gave his first piano recital at the age of nine and at eighteen he made his London debut playing Rachmaninov's *Third Piano Concerto* with Sir Adrian Boult conducting. His many awards include First Prize at the Moscow International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1970. Unanimously described as the leading British pianist of his generation, John Lill has performed all over the world, working with many of its finest orchestras and conductors. His extensive repertoire exceeds eighty concertos and he is acclaimed in particular as a leading interpreter of Beethoven, whose complete sonata cycle he has performed on several occasions in Britain, the United States and Japan. He has given many concerts in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Europe, Russia, Japan and Australia, and has recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, EMI, ASV, Chandos, Conifer and Nimbus

Records, including the complete concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, the complete sonatas of Beethoven and Prokofiev and all of the concertos and major solo works of Rachmaninov. He has been awarded many Honorary Doctorates from British Universities and Fellowships from the leading music Colleges and Academies, and was awarded the OBE in 1978 and the CBE in 2005 for his services to music.

## Leslie Howard



Photo: Edoardo Brotto

A citizen both of Britain and Australia, Leslie Howard has accomplished a feat unequalled by any solo artist in recording history – his 99-CD survey for Hyperion of the complete piano music of Franz Liszt, including all seventeen works for piano and orchestra. Accomplished within fourteen years, it encompasses more than 300 world premières, with many works prepared from Liszt's unpublished manuscripts and works unheard since Liszt's lifetime. This critically acclaimed project merited Leslie Howard's entry in the *Guinness Book of Records*, six Grands Prix du Disque, the Medal of St Stephen, the Pro Cultura Hungarica award and a mounted bronze cast of Liszt's hand presented by the Hungarian President. Leslie Howard has appeared internationally with the world's finest orchestras, including the London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, English Northern Philharmonia, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra of Dublin, Hanover Band, Utah Symphony, Maryland Symphony, Mexico Philharmonic, Orchestra della Scala, Budapest Philharmonic, Budapest Symphony, and the orchestras of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Queensland and Tasmania.

## Mark Bebbington



Photo: Rama Knight

Mark Bebbington studied at the Royal College of Music where he was a recipient of numerous international awards and prizes, and later studied in Italy with Aldo Ciccolini. Increasingly recognised as a champion of British music, he has recorded extensively for the SOMM "New Horizons" label to unanimous critical acclaim. His most recent releases, four *British Piano Concertos* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, a première recording of Arnold Bax's *Piano Concertino* coupled with John Ireland's *Piano Concerto* and *Legend* with the Orchestra of the Swan, and premières of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia* and William Mathias' first two *Piano Concertos* with the Ulster Orchestra, were released in 2013 and have met with great acclaim. In addition to concerto recordings he completed his John Ireland and Frank Bridge solo piano series and released a recording of William Alwyn's piano works in 2014: seven CDs earning him consecutive sets of 5\*\*\*\*\* in *BBC Music Magazine*. Over recent seasons Mark Bebbington has toured extensively throughout Central and Northern Europe, as well as the Far East and North Africa. His 2014 appearances include his Carnegie Hall début with Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra.

## Julian Jacobson



Photo: Roger Harris

Julian Jacobson studied piano and composition from the age of seven with Lamar Crowson and Arthur Benjamin, subsequently studying at the Royal College of Music, Queen's College, Oxford and privately with Louis Kentner. He enjoys an international career as soloist, chamber musician with many prominent artists, and teacher, appearing in over forty countries and making annual visits in recent years to Australia and the Far East. He has been soloist with several of the principal British orchestras under conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle, Jane Glover and Tamás Vásáry, as well as appearing at most of the leading British festivals. He has been particularly acclaimed for his performances of the Beethoven *Sonatas*, of which he has given eight complete cycles, most recently at The Forge, Camden Town (2011-12). In 2003 he performed the entire cycle in a single day in aid of the charity WaterAid, an event which attracted worldwide media coverage and which he repeated in October 2013 at St Martin-in-the-Fields.



The **British Music Society** (Registered Charity No. 1043838), founded in 1979, brings together professional and amateur musicians, students and scholars, and music enthusiasts young and old from around the globe to promote, preserve and celebrate British music, pre-dominantly from the Twentieth century, both at home and abroad. Its extensive discography is now being re-issued by Naxos, bringing to a wider audience many highly-acclaimed performances, often world premières, of neglected British works. The Society's Historic label includes a number of famous vintage recordings by artists such as Noel Mewton-Wood and Walter Goehr.

In addition the Society produces a Journal, *British Music*, packed full of scholarly articles and reviews, as well as a regular e-newsletter for members. Our website lists forthcoming BMS events as well as performances of British music, and also provides a forum for discussion and debate.

[www.britishmusicsociety.com](http://www.britishmusicsociety.com)



This unique recording owes its existence to Malcolm Smith (1932-2011), who was a leading and popular figure in London's musical life. He was a stalwart of numerous organisations and festivals, a friend of the greatest composers and a tireless advocate of British music. A Vice President of the British Music Society, Smith bequeathed a sum of money to facilitate this recording, which includes Robin Holloway's six-handed *Grand Heroical March*, Leslie Howard's Sullivan-inspired *Ruddigore Fantasy*, and Humphrey Searle's *Sonata*, described by *The Times* in 1951 as 'suffused with darkling, elegiac poetry and commanding thought'.



## THE MALCOLM SMITH MEMORIAL ALBUM

- 1 **Robin Holloway (b. 1943):** Grand Heroical March for six hands at one piano, to mark the departure from Messrs Boosey and Hawkes of Malcolm Smith, May 23, 1997 (with grateful acknowledgements to F.D., Sir E.E., and R.A.F.) (1982/1997) \* **5:20**
- 2 **Leslie Howard (b. 1948):** Ruddigore: Fantaisie de concert pour piano, Op. 40, d'après l'opéra de Sullivan (2005) \* **11:11**
- 3 **Robert Matthew-Walker (b. 1939):** Fantasy-Sonata: Hamlet (Piano Sonata No. 3) (1980) \* **16:43**
- 4 **G.F. Handel (1685-1759):** Come, but keep thy wonted state, from *L'allegro ed il penseroso* (trans. Leslie Howard) (2010) \* **3:57**
- 5 **Humphrey Searle (1915-1982):** Piano Sonata, Op. 21 (1951) **18:08**

\*WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

**John Lill, Piano Primo** 1

**Leslie Howard, Piano Secondo** 1 • **Piano Solo** 2 4

**Mark Bebbington, Piano Terzo** 1 • **Piano Solo** 3

**Julian Jacobson, Piano Solo** 5

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