

# CHAMBER MUSIC WITH VIOLA

**Bowen • Britten • I. Holst**

**Yue Yu, Viola**  
**Anthony Hewitt, Piano**  
**Jeffrey Armstrong, Violin**

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<b>York BOWEN</b> (1884–1961)		<b>York BOWEN</b>	
<b>1</b> <b>Melody for the C String, Op. 51, No. 2</b> (c. 1918)	<b>4:51</b>	<b>8</b> No. 1. Poco lento	<b>6:21</b> 3:37
<b>2</b> <b>Allegro de Concert, Op. 21, No. 2</b> (1906)†	<b>8:58</b>	<b>9</b> No. 2. Allegro vigoroso	1:37
<b>Imogen HOLST</b> (1907–1984)		<b>10</b> No. 3. Presto leggiero	1:00
<b>Four Easy Pieces</b> (1935)	<b>6:07</b>	<b>11</b> <b>Romance in A major, Op. 21, No. 1</b> (1908)†	<b>6:20</b>
<b>3</b> No. 1. Timothy's Trot	0:42	<b>Imogen HOLST</b>	
<b>4</b> No. 2. A Farewell	1:44	<b>Duo for Viola and Piano</b> (1968)	<b>10:03</b>
<b>5</b> No. 3. Mill-Field	2:22	<b>12</b> I. Allegro molto	2:28
<b>6</b> No. 4. Jenny is Dancing	1:04	<b>13</b> II. Poco lento	3:43
<b>Benjamin BRITTEN</b> (1913–1976)		<b>14</b> III. Vivace	3:47
<b>7</b> <b>Suite for Violin and Piano, Op. 6 – V. Waltz:</b> <b>Alla valse, vivace e rubato</b> (1934–35)†	<b>5:21</b>	<b>York BOWEN</b>	
		<b>15</b> <b>Romance in D flat major</b> (1900, arr. 1904)†	<b>6:03</b>
		<b>16</b> <b>Melody for the G String, Op. 47</b> (c. 1917)†	<b>4:59</b>
		<b>17</b> <b>Rhapsody in G minor, Op. 149</b> (1955)	<b>15:29</b>

† Version for viola and piano

Publishers: Swan & Co Ltd **1**, Josef Weinberger Ltd **2** **11** **17**, Stainer & Bell Ltd **3**–**6**, from manuscript (copyright holder: Boosey & Hawkes. Recording by permission of Britten Pears Arts) **7**, from manuscript (copyright holder: York Bowen Trust, courtesy of the Royal Academy of Music) **8**–**10**, from manuscript (copyright holder: The Holst Foundation) **12**–**14**, Comus Edition **15**, Swan & Co Ltd **16**

Born in 1884 at Crouch Hill, London, York Bowen attended various music colleges, including the Blackheath Conservatoire, before winning a scholarship, at the age of 14, to the Royal Academy of Music. There, he studied piano with Tobias Matthay and composition with Frederick Corder. He soon gained a reputation as an outstanding pianist and he was also an accomplished horn and viola player. Lionel Tertis, the distinguished violist, was a professor at the RAM and Bowen, who is said to have preferred the tone of the viola to the violin, became his accompanist. Inspired by Tertis's virtuosity and richness of tone, Bowen also wrote several works for him, including two sonatas, a concerto and many shorter pieces. Bowen served in World War One in the band of the Scots Guards until 1916, when pneumonia forced him to convalesce at home. After the war, his reputation declined as his Romantic musical idiom fell from fashion. He held the post of professor of piano at the RAM for 50 years until his retirement in 1959 and continued to be active as a teacher, pianist and composer until his sudden death in November 1961.

Bowen's *Melody for the C string, Op. 51, No. 2* was composed around 1918. Intended to provide a showcase for the sonorous tone of the viola's lowest string, this intensely expressive piece incorporates characteristically subtle shifts of key. Bowen's judicious sprinkling of harmonics offers momentary contrast to the richly resonant main material, while also deftly expanding the music's register.

Originally composed for cello and piano, Bowen's *Allegro de Concert* dates from February 1906. Soon after, he arranged the solo part for viola and the score is most often encountered in this incarnation. This ambitious work provides every opportunity for bravura playing from both performers in its spirited opening and closing sections, while the wistful, slower central episode requires a more ruminative, introspective approach.

Imogen Holst (1907–1984) was born in Richmond, Surrey, the only child of Gustav Holst. Educated at St Paul's School for Girls, where her father was director of music, she went to the Royal College of Music to study composition with George Dyson and Gordon Jacob, harmony and counterpoint with Ralph Vaughan Williams, and conducting with William H. Reed. In 1928 she won the Cobbett Prize for her *Phantasy String Quartet*. Director of music at Dartington (1943 to 1951), she acted as music assistant to Benjamin Britten (1952 to 1964) and was also artistic director of the Aldeburgh Festival (1956 to 1977). Her creative output includes concertos for oboe and violin, a sonata for violin and cello, two string trios and a string quintet. She also produced valuable arrangements of folk dances and songs. An unflagging champion of her father, she wrote a biography of him and another book on his music, as well as preparing and revising scholarly editions of her father's scores and compiling a thematic catalogue of his music.

Imogen Holst's *Four Easy Pieces* were written in 1935. They illustrate the composer's flair for converting educational music for amateur performers into something of substance. An open-air freshness pervades the score, from the crisp, neo-Classical rhythms of *Timothy's Trot* and the wistful lyricism of the descending viola lines in *A Farewell*, to the lilting, elegant pastoralism of *Mill-Field* and the high spirits of *Jenny is Dancing*, with its drone-like pizzicato viola chords.

Born in Lowestoft, Suffolk on St Cecilia's Day in 1913, Benjamin Britten started to compose at the age of five and began to take viola lessons when he was ten years old. In 1927, Britten's viola teacher, Audrey Alston, introduced him to the composer Frank Bridge, also a violist. Bridge became Britten's composition teacher and a key figure in his creative development. Britten's significance in English musical life was confirmed when he founded the English Opera Group in 1946 and the Aldeburgh Festival two years later. His music covers a wide range of genres, including several operas, *Peter Grimes*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* among them, choral works such as the *War Requiem*, commissioned for the reopening of the newly built Coventry Cathedral, and chamber music, including three string quartets, as well as songs and orchestral works. Britten's greatest piece for viola is arguably the haunting *Lachrymae – Reflections on a Song of Dowland*, for viola and piano, which he composed in 1950 and arranged for viola and string orchestra shortly before his death at Aldeburgh in December 1976, a few months after becoming the first ever composer to be appointed a life peer.

Britten wrote his *Suite for Violin and Piano, Op. 6* in 1934–35 and arranged it for viola and piano at around the same time. The fifth piece in the suite is a *Waltz*, marked *Alla valse, vivace e rubato* and is presented here in the version for viola and piano. The spiky, parodic nature of the piece pre-echoes the pungent wit of the *Wiener Walzer* in Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, for string orchestra, of 1937.

It is unclear exactly when York Bowen's *Three Duos for Violin and Viola* were written, though in his book, *An Anthology of British Viola Players*, John White suggests they date from 'the late 1940s'. The *Duos* were not published until 2017. These engaging short pieces all feature eloquent, purposeful dialogues between the two instruments, who often share material in closely argued, imitative lines. Bowen frequently enriches the sonorities by means of plangent chordal writing. The first duo is expansive and richly decorated, the lively, intense second is concentrated upon the three-note figure with which it begins and ends, while the busy final duo has the character of a puckish *moto perpetuo*.

Initially entitled *Nocturne*, York Bowen's *Romance in A major, Op. 21, No. 1* was written in 1908, originally for cello and piano. At the same time, or shortly afterwards, the composer arranged the piece for viola. The musical narrative is superbly balanced, with two intensely expressive climaxes unerringly placed and a deeply expressive coda, with the viola line ascending to the heights above a series of sonorous piano chords.

Dedicated to violist Cecil Aronowitz and pianist Nicola Grunberg, Imogen Holst's *Duo for Viola and Piano* was written in 1968 and premiered by the dedicatees in a concert of music at that year's Aldeburgh Festival, which also included songs by Gustav Holst. In correspondence in 2006 with Christopher Grogan, editor of the book, *Imogen Holst: a Life in Music*, Nicola Grunberg recalled rehearsing the *Duo* with the composer, who, 'although sweetness itself, was very particular'. The prickly, tenacious opening *Allegro* is marked *staccato* and is dominated by its initial three-note motif, though contrast is provided by a recurring rocking, arpeggiated figure. Following without a break, the central, fantasia-like slow movement is expansive and elaborately ornamented. The closing *Vivace* is the *Duo's* most extended movement. The initial piano solo's jagged rhythms are eventually juxtaposed with pizzicato viola quavers before the two instruments finally come together. There is a spontaneous-sounding, cadenza-like episode for the viola and then the two instruments continue their terse, laconic narrative.

York Bowen's *Romance in D flat major* was originally scored for violin and piano in 1900, but the composer transcribed the solo part for the viola in 1904. Though this is an early student work, Bowen's musical personality is already fully-fledged and his ability to create and sustain a heartfelt, songlike melodic line and to fashion detailed and effective piano accompaniment much in evidence. The tender, reflective opening gives way to more impulsive gestures in the short, impassioned central passage. In the hesitant, poetic closing bars, the music dies away to nothing.

Bowen's *Melody for the G string, Op. 47*, in G flat major, was conceived for violin or viola playing in the same octave register. The mood is nostalgic and wistful as the music unfolds gently and with a sense of inevitability, the material governed, for the most part, by the rhythm in the violinist's opening phrase. A more urgent, sweeping central section stretches the viola's melodic range. In the hushed closing bars, an authentic sense of serenity is achieved. This work was published, together with the later *Melody for the C string*, in 1923.

In 1955 York Bowen composed the *Rhapsody in G minor, Op. 149*, for the viola player Maurice Loban, to whom it is dedicated. This incisive, self-assured work is in one continuous movement cast in three distinct sections, with two vigorous outer portions framing a slower and more rapt central passage. The music is powerful and poised, exploiting to the full the viola's expressive range. In his book, *An Anthology of British Viola Players*, John White describes the *Rhapsody* as 'possibly one of Bowen's most important works'.

**Paul Conway**

## Anthony Hewitt

Award-winning British pianist Anthony Hewitt has performed internationally with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C., and with leading orchestras in Germany, Poland, Russia and the UK. He has appeared at prestigious venues across the UK including Royal Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall and the Purcell Room, London and Symphony Hall, Birmingham. Hewitt's discography includes his critically acclaimed debut album *Live at the Wigmore* (Master Musicians); *Protégé* (Divine Art), the first coupling on disc of the Liszt and Reubke sonatas, which received praise in *International Record Review* and *Gramophone*; and a 2015 recording of the complete preludes of Scriabin (Champs Hill Records), which was lauded in *The Guardian*, among others. In 2004, Hewitt founded the Ulverston International Music Festival. He is also on the faculty of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. In 2012, as the 'Olympianist', he cycled from Land's End to John O'Groats with a piano in his 'BeethoVan', giving a full-length recital at the end of each day and raising £13,000 for charity. [www.anthonyhewitt.co.uk](http://www.anthonyhewitt.co.uk)



Photo © Patrick Allen



## Jeffrey Armstrong

South African-born violinist Jeffrey Armstrong currently studies with Elisabeth Kufferath at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover. He previously studied at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, where he received many accolades, including the Principal's Prize. In 2021 he was awarded First Prize at the UNISA National Strings Competition. Armstrong has performed as a soloist with the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra. He has participated in the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival in South Africa and Wye Valley Chamber Music Festival, and as part of Lawrence Power's string ensemble Collegium has appeared alongside John Myerscough and Vilde Frang. During his Bachelor's degree, Armstrong performed with the Continental and Fletcher String Quartets, with engagements at venues including Wigmore Hall, Cheltenham Town Hall and Windsor Castle. In Hanover, he is often concertmaster of Ensemble Geräuschkulisse. He has been coached and mentored by musicians including Oliver Wille, Jian Wang, Eberhard Feltz, Anthony Spiri, Jonathan Kelly and Louise Lansdown. Armstrong recently founded the Cape Chamber Music Collective, and has also been involved in the ARCO Project. Photo © Nina Lawrenson

## Yue Yu

Named as one of the 2022 Classic FM Rising Stars, violist Yue Yu (b. 1997, Shenzhen, China) was the winner of the 2021 Salzburg Paul Hindemith Viola Concorso and the 2019 Stockport International Young Musicians Competition. A finalist in the 2017 Cecil Aronowitz International Viola Competition, she was awarded a £5,000 silver mounted Guillaume viola bow for her outstanding performance of Bowen's *Viola Sonata No. 1 in C minor*. Yue studied at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire with Louise Lansdown, where she also won numerous prizes and awards, including the Principal's Prize, and is currently a student at the Universität Mozarteum Salzburg, studying with Thomas Riebl. She is also a scholar at the International Academy of Music in Liechtenstein, and a member of Ensemble Esperanza. Yue has given concerts in prestigious venues such as Wigmore Hall, London; Town Hall, Birmingham and Solitär Hall, Salzburg. Chamber music is one of her greatest passions. She has worked with Pavel Gililov, Lea Hausmann and Sam Shepherd (of the Amatis Piano Trio), Krysia Osostowicz, the London Bridge Trio and the Primrose Piano Quartet, and has attended numerous leading international chamber music festivals. <https://yueyuviola.com>

Photo © Maxime Michaluk



An accomplished horn and viola player, York Bowen is said to have preferred the tone of the viola to the violin. Inspired by the virtuosity and vibrato style of the distinguished violist, Lionel Tertis, Bowen wrote several works for him and became his accompanist. Bowen's subtle shifts of key and heartfelt melodies are well in evidence here, including the powerful and poised *Rhapsody, Op. 149*, considered to be one of his most important works. Gustav Holst's daughter Imogen is represented here by the open-air freshness of her *Four Easy Pieces* and the terse, laconic narrative of her *Duo for Viola and Piano*. Britten's spiky *Waltz* is full of 1930s wit.

## Chamber Music with Viola

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|---|-------------|---|--------------|
| York BOWEN (1884–1961)                        |             | [11] <b>Romance in A major, Op. 21,</b>     |              |
| [1] <b>Melody for the C String, Op. 51,</b>   |             | <b>No. 1 (1908)†</b>                        | <b>6:20</b>  |
| <b>No. 2 (c. 1918)</b>                        | <b>4:51</b> | Imogen HOLST                                |              |
| [2] <b>Allegro de Concert, Op. 21,</b>        |             | [12–14] <b>Duo for Viola and Piano</b>      |              |
| <b>No. 2 (1906)†</b>                          | <b>8:58</b> | <b>(1968)</b>                               | <b>10:03</b> |
| Imogen HOLST (1907–1984)                      |             | York BOWEN                                  |              |
| [3–6] <b>Four Easy Pieces (1935)</b>          | <b>6:07</b> | [15] <b>Romance in D flat major</b>         |              |
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| [7] <b>Suite for Violin and Piano, Op. 6</b>  |             | [16] <b>Melody for the G String, Op. 47</b> |              |
| <b>– V. Waltz: Alla valse, vivace e</b>       |             | <b>(c. 1917)†</b>                           | <b>4:59</b>  |
| <b>rubato (1934–35)†*</b>                     | <b>5:21</b> | [17] <b>Rhapsody in G minor, Op. 149</b>    |              |
| York BOWEN                                    |             | <b>(1955)</b>                               | <b>15:29</b> |
| [8–10] <b>Three Duos for Violin and Viola</b> |             | † Version for viola and piano               |              |
| <b>(late 1940s)**</b>                         | <b>6:21</b> |   |              |

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

\* FIRST RECORDING OF THIS VERSION \*\* FIRST COMMERCIAL AUDIO RECORDING

Yue Yu, Viola

Anthony Hewitt, Piano [1–7] [11–17]

Jeffrey Armstrong, Violin [8–10]

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