

CHANDOS

Transatlantic

Adams
Arnold
Bernstein
Britten
Gershwin
Horowitz
Langford
Price
Vaughan Williams
Walton

Onyx Brass
John Wilson



PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo

Malcolm Arnold, at Elstree Studios during work on the score for the film 'The Key', c. 1958

Sir William Walton (1902 – 1983)

première recording

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------|
| 1 | Roaring Fanfare (1976)* Music for Brass To Solly Z., that Lion of Lions Maestoso non troppo – Presto – Tempo I – Presto | 0:59 |
|---|---|-------------|

John Adams (b. 1947)

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------|
| 2 | China Gates (1977) for Piano For Sarah Arranged for Brass Quintet by David Gordon Shute ♩ = 72 | 5:31 |
|---|---|-------------|

Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976)

Completed 2022 by **Bernard Hughes** (b. 1974)

première recording

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------|
| 3 | Funeral March (1938)* for Brass Ensemble Lento alla marcia funebre | 4:08 |
|---|---|-------------|

Florence Price (1887–1953)

première recording

| | | |
|---|--|--------------|
| | Octet for Brasses and Piano (1930)*† | 11:08 |
| 4 | I Tempo moderato – Poco meno mosso – Poco più mosso – Poco meno mosso | 3:20 |
| 5 | II Andante cantabile (with much expression) | 4:35 |
| 6 | III Tempo moderato – Poco meno mosso – Tempo I – Più mosso | 3:12 |

Sir Malcolm Arnold (1921–2006)

| | | |
|---|--|--------------|
| | Quintet No. 1, Op. 73 (1961) | 12:17 |
| | for Two Trumpets, Horn, Trombone, and Tuba | |
| 7 | I Allegro vivace | 4:18 |
| 8 | II Chaconne. Andante con moto | 4:44 |
| 9 | III Con brio | 3:24 |

George Gershwin (1898 – 1937)

première recording

- | | | |
|----|--|-------------|
| 10 | Novelette in Fourths (1919) Prelude for Piano Arranged for Brass Quintet by Timothy Jackson (b. 1972) Tempo rubato – Poco meno mosso | 3:42 |
|----|--|-------------|

Benjamin Britten

première recording

- | | | |
|----|--|-------------|
| 11 | A Fanfare for June 30th 1970 (1970)* for Four Trumpets, Four Trombones, and Two Tubas Slow & majestic – Lively (quick march) – Tempo I – Quick march | 2:57 |
|----|--|-------------|

Gordon Langford (1930 – 2017)

Prelude, Polonaise, and Promenade (date uncertain) **7:05**
for Brass Quintet

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|------|
| 12 | Prelude. Allegro | 2:24 |
| 13 | Polonaise. Con moto | 2:28 |
| 14 | Promenade. Allegro Moderato | 2:12 |

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)

première recording

- | | | |
|--|---|-------------|
| 15 | <p>Flourish on the 'Morris Call' (1935)* for Trumpets (or Cornets), Horns, Trombones, Side Drum, and Cymbals Edited and Arranged for Symphonic Brass by Christopher Gordon (b. 1956) Allegro</p> | 0:31 |
|--|---|-------------|

Joseph Horowitz (1926 – 2022)

- | | | |
|--|---|--------------|
| | <p>Music Hall Suite (1964) for Brass Quintet</p> | 11:14 |
| 16 | I Soubrette Song. Allegretto | 2:22 |
| 17 | II Trick-cyclists. Vivace | 1:35 |
| 18 | III Adagio – Team. Lento Moderato | 2:39 |
| 19 | IV Soft-shoe-shuffle. Moderato ma giocoso – Coda | 2:38 |
| 20 | V 'Les Girls'. Allegro Vivace ma comodo | 1:59 |

Leonard Bernstein (1918 – 1990)

Dance Suite (1989 – 90) 5:02

for Brass Quintet

For the Empire Brass Quintet

- | | | | |
|--|-----|--|------|
| 21 | I | Dancisca. For Antony [Tudor]. Vivo, celebrante | 0:54 |
| 22 | II | Waltz. For Agnes [de Mille]. Tempo di Valse (leggiere) | 0:46 |
| 23 | III | Bi-Tango. For Misha [Mikhail Baryshnikov]. Allegretto grazioso | 0:39 |
| 24 | IV | Two-Step. For Mr B [George Balanchine]. Allegretto leggermente | 0:34 |
| 25 | V | M T V. For Jerry [Jerome Robbins]. Cool – (Doppio più presto) Driving – Even cooler | 2:06 |

TT 64:46

Onyx Brass

Viv McLean piano[†]

Onyx Brass

John Wilson*

trumpet

Niall Keatley†
Alan Thomas†
Christian Barraclough
Rebecca Crawshaw

horn

Andrew Sutton†
David Pyatt

tenor trombone

Amos Miller†
Isobel Daws (solo in
Funeral March)
Becky Smith
Andy White

alto trombone

Isobel Daws

bass trombone

Andy Wood
Ed Hilton

tuba

David Gordon Shute†

tenor tuba

Becky Smith

timpani and percussion

Rachel Gledhill
Tim Gunnell
Matt Dickinson

drum kit

Matt Senior (*Dance Suite*
only)

† member of Onyx Brass
quintet

Transatlantic

Introduction

This album combines pieces for the core quintet of Onyx Brass with pieces for extended brass forces, plus piano in the case of Florence Price's *Octet for Brasses and Piano*. The majority of the pieces are receiving their first commercial recording, the two Britten premières bringing two long-forgotten pieces out of the Britten Pears Archive, in Aldeburgh, into the sunlight. Alongside these new discoveries are performances of established favourites by Sir Malcolm Arnold and Joseph Horowitz, staples of the chamber brass repertoire for more than half a century.

Britten: A Fanfare for June 30th 1970

Although he wrote wonderfully for brass instruments – see the opening of *Gloriana* or *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* – Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976) only published two pieces scored for brass alone, the *Russian Funeral*, from 1936, and the tiny but brilliantly imaginative *Fanfare for St Edmundsbury*, of 1959. He used a lot of the same sounds and techniques of free canon which he exploits in the latter in another occasional piece, *A Fanfare for June 30th*

1970, written for the farewell gala for Sir David Webster, the retiring chief executive of the Royal Opera House. The fanfare, scored for ten instruments, has never been published, nor recorded; nor has it even been heard in public till Onyx Brass unveiled it at the 2025 Aldeburgh Festival. According to the composer's note, the fanfare 'is based on a series of rising fifths, which celebrate the Royal Opera House (C--E-- G-----) and its retiring General Administrator (DA--- -EB--E-)', which Britten garlands with 'scraps of nine of Sir David's favourite operatic tunes'. He adds: 'No prizes are offered for their identification.'

Britten: Funeral March

Also new to the Britten brass catalogue is the completion of a fragment of a *Funeral March* which Britten started in 1938, but never finished. A pencil sketch of the first seventeen bars of music for brass octet with timpani, which includes a couple of scrawled sentences of notes about their continuation, was retained by the Archive at the Red House. In 2022, I was invited by Onyx Brass, with the agreement of Britten Pears Arts, to prepare a completion, which extends the piece to

forty-six bars, realising Britten's scribbled intentions. The opening section presents an elaborate melody in the trombone, over pairs of notes in the timpani. The horns are introduced shortly before Britten's notations come to an end, and the trumpets take up this figure, building to a big B flat major climax. The final section sees a return of the opening trombone tune, now decorated by canons in the horns and trumpets, before the music dissolves to nothing beyond the return of the timpani gesture heard at the start.

Walton: Roaring Fanfare

Among the other premières are a pair of tiny miniatures by leading British composers of the twentieth century. Sir William Walton (1902 – 1983) had a definite knack for writing grand ceremonial music, including a number of fanfares, for occasions ranging from the seventy-fifth birthday of the EMI company to a birthday gift for his next-door neighbour on Ischia, in 1981. The *Roaring Fanfare* was composed for the entrance of the Queen at a reception marking the 150th anniversary of the Zoological Society of London, in 1976. Lasting less than a minute, it is scored for trumpets and trombones, to which three percussionists add the appropriate pomp and grandeur.

Vaughan Williams: Flourish on the 'Morris Call'

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958) wrote *Flourish on the 'Morris Call'* for the International Folk Dance Festival at the Royal Albert Hall in London in July 1935, where it was played by the Morris Motors Band. Scored for a symphonic brass ensemble augmented by snare drum and cymbals, it is a brisk and to-the-point call to order, flavoured with the raised fourth note of the scale, which is characteristic of the Lydian mode.

Adams: China Gates

As well as playing on most items on this disc, the Onyx Brass tubist David Gordon Shute also pops up as arranger of the 1977 piano piece *China Gates* by John Adams (b. 1947). This is an early work by the American post-minimalist, the title of which refers to the idiosyncratic harmonic device of his which he dubbed 'gating'. So-called gates are points in the music at which the prevailing harmony shifts into a new underlying chord, and here these occur at regular intervals, each marked by the entry of the tuba. The piece has a brilliant sense of unstable metrical perspectives, the instruments moving at their own rates of speed, coming in and out of sync. The trumpets alternate *arpeggio* figures over more slowly moving melodies in the horn

and trombone, all underpinned by long bass notes on the tuba, each of which is to be held for as long as the player's breathing permits.

Price: Octet for Brasses and Piano

In 2009, a significant cache of scores was found at the abandoned summer home of Florence Price (1887 – 1953), in Illinois. It included the scores of a number of pieces previously unknown, or considered lost, including her two violin concertos and the Fourth Symphony. These have gradually been edited, published, and performed. Among the rediscovered pieces was also the *Octet for Brasses and Piano*, originally dating to 1930, published in 2021, and now receiving its first commercial recording. The Octet has the familiar Price sound world of European classical music tinged with the popular musics of the USA. In three movements, it starts with a melody in the brass, resembling a spiritual, which opens out into a broad theme with hints of Gershwin (perhaps the original composer to combine American vernacular with concert music). The expressive slow movement may owe something to Dvořák's Ninth Symphony *From the New World*, although the long, chromatically meandering central piano solo sounds like no one else. The thickly scored finale has a busy part for the pianist and hits

a gallop in the last few bars, marked by bluesy inflection and glorious, broad brassy chords.

Arnold: Brass Quintet No. 1

Sir Malcolm Arnold (1921 – 2006) started out as a trumpeter – he was the Principal Trumpet of the London Philharmonic Orchestra for several years before his composing career took off – and his brilliant writing for brass reflects this background. His Quintet No. 1 for brass was written in 1961 for the New York Brass Quintet, and its immediate popularity helped establish the standard line-up for the brass quintet: two trumpets, horn, trombone, and tuba. The piece, characterised by Arnold's trademark melodiousness and impish humour, is in three movements. The first kicks off with a fanfare for the trumpets, and continues in mercurial vein. In the second, a sombre Chaconne, the repeating bassline is set out by the tuba at the beginning, the other instruments entering one at a time. The high-spirited finale is a technical *tour de force* for the players, requiring lots of double-tonguing and trombone glissandos. Democratically, everyone – including the tuba – gets the tune.

Gershwin: Novelette in Fourths

Novelette in Fourths is an early Prelude by George Gershwin (1898 – 1937), dating from

1919, at which time he was an up-and-coming songwriter, whose big break – the song 'Swanee' being taken up by Al Jolson – came in the same year. The *Novelette* is a 'cakewalk', a popular dance of the time, and was originally composed for solo piano. Gershwin recorded a piano roll of it, and later arranged it for violin and piano. The arrangement for brass quintet, the earliest of the première recordings on this album, is by Timothy Jackson, the long-time Composer-in-Association of Onyx Brass.

Langford: Prelude, Polonaise, and Promenade

Gordon Langford (1930 – 2017) was a British composer and arranger, particularly known for his works for brass band, although he also wrote and arranged lots of orchestral music in a 'light music' style, frequently broadcast on the BBC on programmes such as *Friday Night Is Music Night*. He also arranged for the King's Singers in the 1970s and was a busy orchestrator on Hollywood films, including *The Return of the Jedi*. The Prelude, Polonaise, and Promenade is of uncertain date, but typical of his tuneful and popular style. It is expertly crafted for the ensemble, showing his technical and melodic facility, and offering notably prominent writing for the tuba, which composers so often relegated in importance.

Horovitz: Music Hall Suite

Along with Arnold's Quintet, another piece well known to the cognoscenti of brass quintet repertoire is the rumbustious and entertaining *Music Hall Suite* by Joseph Horovitz (1926 – 2022). It was written in 1964, at the request of the American tuba player Roger Bobo, and premièred by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble, who made it part of their regular repertoire. The five movements explore various aspects of burlesque theatre, circus, and cabaret, in the composer's typical accessible and engaging style. This is the first recording that uses the metronome marks that Horovitz himself preferred, which he shared verbally with the players of Onyx Brass, and which leave the music less rushed and more resembling that of Kurt Weill. 'Soubrette Song' has a pertness and bounce, 'Trick-cyclists' the appropriate edge of danger, while the 'Adagio – Team' is sentimental and wistful. The saucy and colourful 'Soft-shoe-shuffle' leads into 'Les Girls', which rounds things off at a helter-skelter pace, a brilliant showpiece for the ensemble.

Bernstein: Dance Suite

The disc is closed out by *Dance Suite*, which Leonard Bernstein (1918 – 1990) began in 1989 and completed early the following

year. His last composition, it was premièred in January 1990, by the Empire Brass Quintet, at the Metropolitan Opera House, in New York, the title reflecting Bernstein's original intention that it be choreographed. Each of the five short movements is dedicated to a choreographer or dancer friend of the composer's, starting with 'Dansisca', for Antony Tudor, which plays little quirky metrical games of changing time signatures. The title alludes to the composer's granddaughter, Francisca, for whom the piece was originally composed, to be played on the piano. The blink-and-you-miss-it 'Waltz' is a tribute to Agnes George de Mille, niece of Cecil B. DeMille. The third movement, called 'Bi-Tango' and dedicated to Mikhail Baryshnikov, exploits bitonality and has a kind of lumbering asymmetry, while the 'Two-Step' is for the legendary George Balanchine, fittingly recalling Stravinsky of the 1910s. The finale, 'M T V', a partial tribute to the cable television channel, was written for Jerome Robbins, the co-creator of *West Side Story*, which remains Bernstein's best-known composition, and the high-spirited tunes of which are hinted at here. It is a bright and breezy end both to this album and to Bernstein's composing career.

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Founded in 1993, and initially inspired by the pioneering early years of the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble, **Onyx Brass** remains a leading light in cementing the place of the brass quintet as a medium for serious chamber music. To this end, the group has commissioned and performed the world premières of more than 200 new works; many more are in the pipeline for performance and recording. The group has toured so extensively that very few corners of the UK remain unvisited! It has also performed regularly at festivals and concert halls in the USA, across continental Europe, and in Nigeria, Bermuda, and Borneo to unanimous critical acclaim. It has now recorded sixteen albums, including three previous discs for Chandos Records, to widespread critical praise. Its thirtieth-anniversary album comprised world première recordings of works commissioned from such leading British composers as Mark-Anthony Turnage, Errollyn Wallen, Zoë Martlew, and Yshani Perinpanayagam. The magazine *BBC Music* has described the group as 'easily the classiest brass ensemble in Britain', while *Gramophone* has hailed it for 'some of the most thrilling chamber brass-playing of its kind'. Presenters and reviewers regularly feature its discography on BBC Radio 3 and have been unstinting in their praise:

'Stunningly crisp brass playing' (Kate Molleson), 'Playing just brilliantly... these consummate musicians... play faultlessly' (Suzy Klein), 'fantastic classical brass quintet, their virtuosity is absolutely staggering... They are brilliant!' (Sarah Walker), 'Wonderful, virtuoso brass quintet' (Roger Vignoles, *Record Review*).

Committed to education, Onyx Brass has led workshops and master-classes in an enormous variety of contexts, ranging from primary school reception classes to The Juilliard School, New York. It has held various residencies, for example at the Royal Welsh School of Music and Drama, Westminster Abbey Choir School, and Imperial College London. Work with singers also forms a central part of its work: the group recorded an album with the Choir of Westminster Abbey, featuring the music of Parry, which reached the top spot in the specialist classical chart. In recent years the group has worked regularly with the BBC Singers, St Bride's Choir, Fleet Street, and the cathedral choirs of Winchester and Norwich. The individual members of Onyx Brass are also active orchestral musicians, holding (or having held) permanent positions in the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of English National

Opera, Royal Ballet Sinfonia, and English Chamber Orchestra.

Described by *Le Monde* as 'possessing the genius one finds in those who know how to forget themselves', since winning First Prize at the Maria Canals International Piano Competition, in Barcelona, the British pianist **Viv McLean** has performed in all the major venues in the UK, as well as throughout continental Europe, Japan, Australia, and the USA. He has performed concertos with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, Hallé, BBC Concert Orchestra, Orchestra of the Swan, and Northern Chamber Orchestra, among others. He often collaborates with groups such as the Leopold String Trio, Ensemble 360, Onyx Brass, Quatuor Ysaÿe, and Sacconi Quartet, as well as with artists of the calibre of Natalie Clein, Alice Neary, Daniel Hope, Lawrence Power, David Le Page, Adrian Brendel, and Mary Bevan. He has appeared at many festivals, including the international Beethovenfest, in Bonn, Festival des Saintes, in France, Vinterfestspill i Bergstaden, in Norway, and Cheltenham International Festival, in the UK. He made his BBC Radio 3 recital début through the BBC Radio 3 Young Artists' Forum and has also recorded

for Classic FM, WDR Radio, in Germany, Radio France, ABC Radio, in Australia, NRK Radio, in Norway, and the Sky Arts television channel. Collaborating with numerous labels, Viv McLean has amassed a wide-ranging discography.

Born in Gateshead and since 2011 a Fellow of the Royal College of Music where he studied composition and conducting, **John Wilson** is now in demand at the highest level across the globe and has over the past thirty years conducted many of the world's finest orchestras. In 2018 he relaunched Sinfonia of London, which *The Arts Desk* described as 'the most exciting thing currently happening on the British orchestral scene'. His much-anticipated BBC Proms début with this orchestra, in 2021, was praised by *The Guardian* as 'truly outstanding' and admired by *The Times* for its 'revelatory music-making'. They are now highly sought-after across the UK, the 2024 / 25 season notable for performances at major UK venues including the Barbican Centre, Bridgewater Hall, and Glasshouse

International Centre for Music, as well as a return to the BBC Proms. Their large and varied discography having received near universal critical acclaim, in the autumn of 2024 they released their twenty-fourth album since 2019. Their CDs have earned several awards, including numerous *BBC Music Magazine* Awards: for recordings of Korngold's Symphony in F sharp (2020), Respighi's Roman Trilogy (2021), Dutilleux's *Le Loup* (2022), Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* (2024), and works by Vaughan Williams, Howells, Delius, and Elgar, a disc which won the Orchestral Award and was chosen Recording of the Year. *The Observer* described the Respighi recording as 'Massive, audacious and vividly played' and *The Times* declared it one of the three 'truly outstanding accounts of this trilogy' of all time, alongside those by Toscanini (1949) and Muti (1984). In March 2019, John Wilson was awarded the prestigious Distinguished Musician Award of the Incorporated Society of Musicians for his services to music and in 2021 was appointed Henry Wood Chair of Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music.



Courtesy of Onyx Brass

The musicians of Florence Price's 'Octet for Brasses and Piano'



David Levenson

Viv McLean

Also available



Festmusik
A Legacy
CHSA 5284

Also available



Fanfares
CHSA 5221



Fugue
CHAN 10462

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The William Walton Estate



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Chandos Records Ltd, Chandos House, 1 Commerce Park, Commerce Way, Colchester, Essex CO2 8HX, UK.
E-mail: enquiries@chandos.net Telephone: + 44 (0)1206 225 200 Fax: + 44 (0)1206 225 201



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Chandos 24-bit / 96 kHz recording

The Chandos policy of being at the forefront of technology is now further advanced by the use of 24-bit / 96 kHz recording. In order to reproduce the original waveform as closely as possible we use 24-bit, as it has a dynamic range that is up to 48 dB greater and up to 256 times the resolution of standard 16-bit recordings. Recording at the 44.1 kHz sample rate, the highest frequencies generated will be around 22 kHz. That is 2 kHz higher than can be heard by the typical human with excellent hearing. However, we use the 96 kHz sample rate, which will translate into the potentially highest frequency of 48 kHz. The theory is that, even though we do not hear it, audio energy exists, and it has an effect on the lower frequencies which we do hear, the higher sample rate thereby reproducing a better sound.

Microphones

Thuresson: CM 402 (main sound)

Schoeps: MK22 / MK4 / MK6

DPA: 4006 & 4011

Neumann: U89

CM 402 microphones are hand built by the designer, Jörgen Thuresson, in Sweden.

Steinway Model D Concert Grand Piano (serial no. 585 838) courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London

Piano technician: Chris Moulton, Head of Keyboard Technical Services

Recording producer Jonathan Cooper

Sound engineer Alexander James

Editor Jonathan Cooper

A & R administrator Karen Marchlik

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John Wilson

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Onyx Brass
Viv McLean piano[†]
John Wilson^{*}

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Chandos Records Ltd, Chandos House,
1 Commerce Park, Colchester,
Essex CO2 8HX, UK.
enquiries@chandos.net

Contact:
Naxos Deutschland Musik & Video
Vertriebs-GmbH, Gruber Str. 46b,
DE-85586 Poing, Germany.
info@naxos.de