
NAXOS
BRITISH MUSIC FOR CELLO AND PIANO
William Wordsworth • Josef Holbrooke • William Busch
Raphael Wallfisch, Cello • Raphael Terroni, Piano

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William Wordsworth (1908-88) · Josef Holbrooke (1878-1958) · William Busch (1901-45)

This recording unites significant cello works by three London-born composers who have undoubtedly had less than their due of critical recognition.

William Wordsworth (1908-88) wrote prolifically in most genres, but several significant works remain unperformed – among them a massive oratorio, *Dies Domini* (1942-44), which was admired by Vaughan Williams. A descendant of the brother of the poet William Wordsworth, he was born in London into a clerical family (his great grandfather had been Bishop of Lincoln) and was educated at home by his father, a vicar. However his musical talents were noticed by a piano teacher, Miss Sterry, who gave Wordsworth piano lessons and steered him into a more general musical education under the well-known organist, choirmaster and church composer George Oldroyd, at St Michael's, Croydon. Oldroyd remained Wordsworth's mentor for the next ten years. He then, in his mid-twenties, went to Edinburgh to study for three years under Sir Donald Tovey. From this liberating experience Wordsworth emerged as a fully-fledged composer, without bothering actually to take the university degree.

From then on he devoted himself to composition. His *First String Quartet* (there would eventually be six) won the Clements Memorial Prize in 1941, which attracted a measure of public attention, and for a decade or so thereafter Wordsworth's works were frequently performed and broadcast. Nevertheless he had to struggle against prejudice: he was a convinced pacifist, and during World War II was set to work on the land amid an unsympathetic local community. After the war many of his larger-scale works were premièred at major festivals: this was the period of his greatest professional success. In 1955 Wordsworth joined the executive committee of the Composer's Guild, and was its Chairman in 1959, when he visited the USSR and met Dmitry Shostakovich. In 1961 he decided to make a permanent move from England to Scotland, settling in Invernesshire with his family. Here, he assisted in the formation of the Society of Scottish Composers, whose Honorary President he became. He continued to compose and to be performed, but such performances tended to be of his smaller-scale works. Nevertheless he gradually expanded his stylistic palette (the *Seventh Symphony 'Cosmos'* of 1980 makes use of electronic tape, for example). He died in Kingussie, Invernesshire at the age of 79.

The earliest of Wordsworth's works in this recital is the *Nocturne, Op. 29* which he originally composed in 1946 for viola da gamba and subsequently arranged for cello. Against a gently-lapping, almost monotonous accompaniment of harped piano chords, the cello sings a yearning melody in a tonally-expanded F major. A more animated middle section finds the cello in voluble, cadenza-like vein against rippling piano arpeggios. The opening theme returns, the piano's chords transformed into a rocking figure which has something sinister about it; the cello's last utterances, ending on a high A harmonic, contain a hint of anguish.

The *Scherzo, Op. 42* was written three years later in 1949, during the period of Wordsworth's greatest public success. Though nominally in E flat major, it uses a highly chromatically inflected form of that key, which is almost certainly influenced by his study of Bartók's harmonic procedures. The work is very capricious in its procedures, dominated especially by its opening tick-tock figure of falling fourths, a dotted-rhythm fanfare figure, and various sharp-elbowed melodic motifs. There is no trio as such: a longer-breathed *espressivo* tune leads to a *pianissimo* development of the fanfare-figure that gravitates to G major, from which region an abbreviated reprise gets under way and drives to a *sforzando* close.

Wordsworth's *Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 66* for cello and piano is probably his most important cello-piano composition and was composed in 1959, the year he met Shostakovich in the USSR. There seems to be an audible kinship between the two composers in this dark-hued and often depressive work, which is cast in a single large movement in several contrasting sections. It begins with a remarkable *Lento* introduction – remarkable in the way that it presents a succession of gaunt four-note groups, etching different shapes alternately in cello and piano octaves, that spell out either 11- or 12-note orderings of the chromatic scale. (The first five notes, four on the piano and the fifth in the cello, also spell out, perhaps by coincidence, the opening of the 'Royal Theme' of J.S. Bach's *Musical Offering*.) In no way is the sonata a strictly 12-note work, but the chromatic note-groups outlined in these opening bars colour many of the melodic figures in the ensuing music. There is also a noticeable stress on the pitch C#, the tritone opposite to the official G tonality. A forceful passage of triadic harmony in the piano seems to oppose these opening bars, and leads into an *Allegro risoluto*, though at first there is not much sense of quick motion because of the long note-values of the piano part; it is only with a pulsing variant of the piano's triadic figure that things really get going, with an urgent cello utterance. A passage of high, brightly chiming piano chords initiates a *Poco più sostenuto* section in which the massive triadic sonorities are developed, rising to an anguished climax and then subsiding.

The key signature changes to B minor for a pleading *Adagio espressivo* dominated by the lamenting voice of the cello. The writing for the instrument is sometimes floridly vocal, almost operatic. A stormy *Poco più mosso* builds a sense of struggle and ascent to a climax, the cello then falling back *quasi improvisando* against long-held piano chords. With a reversion to G minor and a change of metre to a lulling 9/8 motion, we move into a scherzo-finale section that effects a dance-like transformation of the opening music and then the *Allegro risoluto* material. This is worked out at some length, the piano keeping up a sardonic ostinato that leads back to a new version of the episode with chiming chords. A massive climax is then built up, *largamente*, and the sonata concludes with the cello giving voice to a fresh lament against the piano's soft triadic chords. The final implication is G major rather than minor, but there is little sense of victory.

In contrast to this large-scale and strenuous sonata, the *Sonata for Violoncello, Op. 70* is in three concise movements. It was composed in 1961, around the time of Wordsworth's move to Scotland. Like all such works it is composed to some extent in the shadow of J.S. Bach's solo cello Suites, but manages to define Wordsworth's independence of mind and melodic invention. The first movement is an *Andante espressivo* in C minor built upon a dark-hued, elegiac *cantabile* theme that rises in a shapely arc from the lowest regions of the cello's register only to fall back again. Much of the movement, in fact, takes place fairly low in the cello, though the more vigorous central section has greater rhythmic variety and is distinguished by wide, angular leaps rather than the main theme's conjunct motion. Only in the final bars does Wordsworth open out from a single line into some plangent double-stopping.

The second movement is an *Allegro scherzando* in A based on a nagging staccato rhythmic subject. A spectral central episode plays around in natural harmonics, and the final section brings the main idea into close juxtaposition with the harmonic figures and some *pizzicato* playing.

The music returns to C minor for the finale, which is the longest and most developed movement. It begins *Sostenuto e quasi parlando* in meditative melancholy, spanning the full range of the cello. This thoughtful music is the introduction to the main *Allegro* movement, a kind of rough, acidulated jig. It works up to a climax that brings back a brief recall of the opening *parlando* music, before an *Allegro* coda in which the jig is revealed as a variation on the *cantabile* theme with which the sonata opened.

Croydon, where Wordsworth sang as a choirboy in George Oldroyd's choir at St Michael's Church, was the birthplace of Josef Holbrooke (1878-1958). (He was Christened 'Joseph', but later adopted the 'Josef' form, perhaps to give it a more Continental ring). Holbrooke, who lost his mother at the age of 2, was the son of an itinerant music-hall pianist, who recognized his son's burgeoning musical gifts; he made his début as a pianist when 12 years old and from then on worked as an accompanist and song-writer. He went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music, London, as a pupil of Frederick Corder, a convinced advocate of the music of Wagner,

which along with that of Berlioz and Liszt left a deep impression on Holbrooke. (He would eventually become known, not altogether kindly or accurately, as 'the Cockney Wagner'.) He enjoyed his greatest success in the first decades of the 20th century. He drew attention to himself with the première of his choral-orchestral setting of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, heard at the Crystal Palace in 1900, and of the same poet's *The Bells*, dedicated to Elgar, in 1903. Poe remained an important literary influence, providing inspiration for many of Holbrooke's works. He went on to write many more ambitious compositions, notably the symphony *Apollo and the Seaman* (premièred, with a simultaneous light-show, by Sir Thomas Beecham), seven other symphonies, a series of symphonic poems, concertos (including one for saxophone), a ballet on Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* and the large-scale operatic trilogy *The Cauldron of Annwyn*, to a libretto derived from the Welsh epic, the *Mabinogion*, by Lord Howard de Walden, who for a time was Holbrooke's patron. Holbrooke was a combative individual, who did not aid the reception of his works by clashing repeatedly, often in print, with his critics; and his star waned after about 1920, when his full-bloodedly Romantic idiom began to seem anachronistic.

Holbrooke was enormously prolific, and continued to compose until his death in 1958, though in his latter years his productivity was much diminished due to failing eyesight. Ernest Newman once wrote of him: 'Holbrooke can do quite easily and unconsciously what Strauss has only done half a dozen times in his career – he can write a big, heartfelt melody that searches us to the very bone'. This kind of pronouncement perhaps hindered rather than helped the composer, since it sounds so extreme as to arouse scepticism. A more useful comparison with Richard Strauss might be this: that although both of them were masters of the orchestra, and of rendering literary models in musical terms, Strauss wrote few chamber works, and those mainly early and among his less distinguished compositions. Whereas Holbrooke was devoted to chamber music throughout his life, and left many of his most admirable and characteristic creations in that genre. His sonatas, quartets, quintets and sextets sometimes have programmatic suggestions in their titles, yet they are essentially absolute music and show a sure command of form.

Holbrooke was an inveterate (perhaps more accurately an obsessive) reviser, re-instrumenter and re-cataloguer of his works, many of which went through changes of form, medium or title. But the *Fantasie-Sonate, Op. 19* seems to have escaped this process. His most substantial work for cello and piano, it is (like the Wordsworth *Second Sonata*) in G minor – said to have been Holbrooke's favourite key – and was composed in 1904. The first performance, though, was not given until 1911, when Mr and Mrs Herbert Withers played it at an Aeolian Hall concert in London. As the title suggests it is in a single movement of the 'fantasy' kind favoured by the chamber-music patron W.W. Cobbett: Holbrooke competed for several of his coveted prizes.

The sonata opens stormily, *Molto allegro fuoco*, the piano setting the scene before the cello storms in after it. The massive piano writing suggests Brahms rather than Liszt. An *espressivo* contrasting theme and some perky dotted-rhythm figures are the other main elements of the rhapsodic opening, which moves eventually to a soulful *Poco adagio* in C minor, in which the cello is muted throughout. This builds to an increasingly emotional climax, only to subside into a lulling *Andante grazioso*. A return of the depressed *Poco adagio* leads in due course back to G minor and the start of a lively finale, *Allegro giocoso con brio*. This has an irresistible main tune, like a patter-song from an operetta, but Holbrooke puts it through some very virtuosic paces. A suaver contrasting tune is developed to a passionate culmination, until the *giocoso* tune breaks through to resolve everything in a carefree dance that comes to a strenuous and decisive end.

London-born of naturalized German parents, William Busch (1901-45) studied piano with Wilhelm Backhaus and Egon Petri. He was a rare composition pupil of Bernard van Dieren as well as a student of John Ireland and the young Alan Bush. He had some success in the 1930s, but was evacuated to Devon at the beginning of the war and died tragically – and it seems almost by chance – in Woolacombe in 1945, after he had visited his wife and newly-born baby daughter in hospital, of a brain haemorrhage while alone in their isolated house with the telephone lines down.

Alan Bush was William Busch's close friend as well as his teacher; other friends included Gerald Finzi and Howard Ferguson; all of them seem to have contributed something to Busch's mature idiom, which is displayed for example in his powerful *Piano Concerto* (1937-38), and equally in his fine song *Rest*, which Janet Baker recorded with Gerald Moore for EMI in the 1960s, and which for a long time was the only recorded work of this elusive composer.

World War II was a period that Busch found emotionally tormenting, as he had friends and family on both sides; also, like Wordsworth, he was a committed pacifist. During the war he turned to creating several works for cello, most notably a *Cello Concerto* dating from 1940-41, written for the well-known British cellist Florence Hooton, who introduced it at the Proms. It was also for Florence Hooton that he wrote the *Suite for Cello and Piano*, his most substantial cello-piano work, in 1943. The first movement, *Prelude*, in A minor, is one of Busch's most eloquent inspirations: the fierce and troubled cello solo with which it opens, and the pungency of the supporting harmony in the piano, has the effect of an impassioned oration. A more lyrical central section does not dissipate the tension. A return to the opening music in more compressed form brings this powerful movement to a brusque end.

The second movement, *Capriccio*, was the first to be composed, and is a rhythmically wayward scherzo in G minor. It is marked *Allegro giocoso*, and there is a certain sardonic playfulness about it. A trio-section in E flat has the character of a rather manic serenade – one thinks of the central movement of Debussy's *Cello Sonata* depicting Pierrot angry with the moon. A return to G minor brings a much-varied reprise of the first section. All in all this is a brilliant, continually-surprising, spikily inventive movement.

The third movement, *Nocturne*, says much in a few notes. The cello is supported by rocking figures in the piano as it muses in its high and middle register with soulful phrases and long notes. The crepuscular atmosphere recalls the late chamber works of Frank Bridge (and, again, the Debussy sonata). The finale is a brilliant *Tarantella* in E minor, dominated by the insistent 12/8 rhythm of that dance. It has an unstoppable and rather sinister momentum and is a fine test of the virtuosity of both players, building to a truculent but exhilarating conclusion.

The two short pieces *A Memory* and *Elegy* are among Busch's last compositions, written in June and July 1944 respectively. (*A Memory* was written for Elizabeth Poston, while William Pleeth premièred the *Elegy* in a BBC broadcast in December 1944.) The E major *A Memory* seems little more than a sketch, which starts out with something of the tranced, nostalgic English-pastoral feel of his song *Rest* but then grows more agitated and ends in a mood of bitter regret with a *con passione* melodic cry that falls through three octaves to the lowest E. This piece is in fact based on *The Promise*, the last song of Busch's song-cycle *There Have Been Happy Days*, composed earlier the same year to poems by Wilfred Gibson.

The more substantial *Elegy*, in F major, starts out *Adagio molto sostenuto* with a long threnodic meditation for cello alone, and for its whole first section the cello dominates, with only a few comments from the piano. It works up however to an *appassionato* statement for the two instruments, out of which emerges a quicker *Allegretto non troppo* second section. This is a variant of the opening statement, at first more lyrical but rising to a lamenting climax, and subsiding to the mood of the opening before the end.

Malcolm MacDonald

Raphael Wallfisch


Photo: Benjamin Ealovega

Raphael Wallfisch was born in London into a family of distinguished musicians, his mother the cellist Anita Lasker-Wallfisch and his father the pianist Peter Wallfisch. At the age of twenty-four he won the Gaspar Cassadó International Cello Competition in Florence. Since then he has enjoyed a world-wide career and is regularly invited to play at major festivals such as the BBC Proms, Edinburgh, Aldeburgh, Spoleto, Prades, Oslo and Schleswig Holstein. His extensive discography explores both the mainstream and lesser- known works by Dohnányi, Respighi, Barber, Hindemith and Martinů, as well as Richard Strauss, Dvořák, Kabalevsky and Khachaturian. He has recorded a wide range of British cello music, including works by MacMillan, Finzi, Delius, Bax, Bliss, Britten, Moeran and Kenneth Leighton. Britain's leading composers have worked closely with him, many having written works especially for him. These include Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, James MacMillan, John Metcalf, Paul Patterson, Robert Simpson, Robert Saxton, Roger Smalley, Giles Swayne, John Tavener and Adrian Williams. In 2014, he succeeded John McCabe as President of the British Music Society.

Raphael Terroni


Photo: John Terroni

Raphael Terroni was born in 1945, and studied the piano with John Vallier and Cyril Smith. For fifteen years he was Head of Piano at the London College of Music and Media, and examined and adjudicated at music festivals in Britain and abroad. He worked with broadcaster Richard Baker, giving first performances in Britain of several works for narrator and piano. He was active in concerts worldwide, and appeared at major festivals as a soloist, accompanist and chamber-music player. A founder member of the British Music Society, he served two terms as the Society's Chairman, and made several critically acclaimed recordings of music by British composers, Lennox Berkeley, Robin Milford, Howard Ferguson, Josef Holbrooke, Eric Coates and Arthur Butterworth among them. His 1989 recording of piano quintets by Cyril Scott and Frank Bridge with the Bingham Quartet was issued on CD for the first time shortly after his untimely death in 2012.

This survey of British cello music focuses on three composers whose critical fortunes have never quite matched their undoubted musical gifts. William Wordsworth always displayed independence of mind and considerable melodic invention, and his cello works reflect a kinship with the music of Bartók and, later, Shostakovich. The short-lived William Busch is represented by his *Suite*, both a passionate oration and a brilliant dance. Much earlier in the twentieth century the prolific Josef Holbrooke composed a *Fantasie-Sonata* that is irresistibly lively and virtuosic.

BRITISH MUSIC FOR CELLO AND PIANO

William Wordsworth (1908-88)

Cello Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 66 (1959) 16:17

1. Lento – Allegro risoluto – 6:07
2. Adagio – Quasi improvvisazione – 4:28
3. In tempo – Poco più mosso – Allegro risoluto – Largamente 5:42

4. **Nocturne, Op. 29 (1946)** 5:41
5. **Scherzo, Op. 42 (1949)** 2:37

Sonata for Violoncello, Op. 70 (1961) 11:57

6. I. Andante espressivo 3:45
7. II. Allegro scherzando 3:15
8. III. Sostenuto e quasi parlando – Allegro 4:57

Josef Holbrooke (1878-1958)

9. **Fantasie-Sonate, Op. 19 (1904)** 14:42

William Busch (1901-45)

Suite for Cello and Piano (1943) 13:56

10. I. Prelude 4:27
11. II. Capriccio 3:54
12. III. Nocturne 2:44
13. IV. Tarantella 2:51

14. **A Memory (1944)** 3:12

15. **Elegy (1944)** 7:13

Raphael Wallfisch, Cello • Raphael Terroni, Piano 1-5 9-15

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