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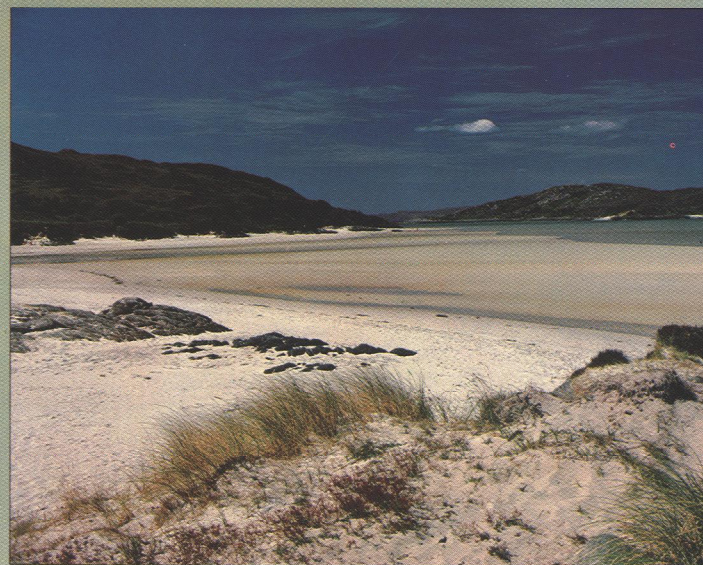
**Chandos**

**DIGITAL**

BRYDEN  
THOMSON  
conductor

ARNOLD  
BAX  
SYMPHONY NO. 4  
~ TINTAGEL ~

ULSTER  
ORCHESTRA





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THE ULSTER ORCHESTRA  
acknowledges the assistance given by the  
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in the production of this record.

Recording Producer: Brian Couzens

Sound engineer: Ralph Couzens

Recorded in the Ulster Hall, Belfast on April 10 & 11, 1983.

Front cover photo: The Sands of Morar on the West Coast of Scotland, reproduced by courtesy of the Scottish Tourist Board.

Sleeve design: Clare Osborn

*'I think that in the lives of all men there must be fleeting moments invested by the imagination from some intangible cause with a vast and awe-inspiring significance out of all proportion to the actual event . . . For in such an instant the veil of enchantment that was woven about our memories in the cave of birth is lifted, only to fall again, alas! before our vision has time to become accustomed to the light that broods upon eternal things . . . On very rare occasions it happens, perchance, to some men to be able to seize for a fraction of a second the hem of the departing dream, and between the clouds of its twilight hair to catch a half-glimpse of those fateful eyes before they fade again into the folded shadows of the ages.'*

Thus wrote the 29-year-old composer Arnold Bax, in his short story called 'The Lifting of the Veil'. It encapsulates his experience of momentary states of ecstatic vision which underly his greatest music. Bax was an intuitive artist who (in his own words) did 'not possess a gift' but was 'possessed by it as by a demon'.

Bax came from an affluent middle-class family. Born in Streatham in South London, his most formative years were spent in the family home which stood in extensive grounds near Hampstead Heath in North London. He never had to take a paid position, and always had a private income.

In 1902, while a student at the Royal Academy of Music, he happened to read W B Yeats' long narrative poem 'The Wanderings of Usheen' and afterwards confessed that 'in a moment the Celt within me stood revealed'. He soon went to Ireland in such a state of spiritual excitement that his existence 'was at first utterly unrelated to material actualities'. Most of his time was spent in the far West, and in particular at the Donegal coastal village of Glencolumcille, a place to which for thirty years he was frequently to return, and where many of his works were written.

His financial independence did allow Bax to travel widely, and in his twenties it was not only Ireland he visited: at least two extended visits were made to the German city of Dresden, and later he pursued a Ukrainian girl to Moscow, St Petersburg and the Ukraine — incidentally taking in *Prince Igor* and the Russian Imperial Ballet on the way.

Bax's earliest attempts at composition were piano pieces, obviously modelled on Chopin and Schumann. Later it was Tchaikovsky and Wagner, and still later Richard Strauss who contributed elements to his developing student technique. Then came

Ireland, and he attempted to write 'Irishly, using figures of a definite Celtic curve'. Later still he looked to Debussy, Ravel and the orchestral apparatus of those composers who wrote for Diaghilev, in particular the early ballets of Stravinsky, which had so far-reaching an influence on the orchestral styles of the British composers of Bax's generation. In Bax's hands these many elements became totally absorbed to form a highly personal and instantly recognisable voice.

In 1902 Bax wrote a String Quartet in A major, which was notable for being cast in three movements, Bax noting on the score that the third movement was 'intended to serve both as Scherzo and Finale'. Thus so early in his career he had already embraced the form in which the symphonies would later be cast. The following year he wrote another quartet – in E major – the slow movement of which, prefaced by a quotation from Yeats, was orchestrated as his first orchestral tone poem with the title *Cathleen-ni-Hoolihan*.

While in Dresden Bax completed, though never orchestrated, a massive Germanic symphony. The following year came another extended quasi-symphonic score, a String Quintet in G, which by virtue of its rich textures and extended working suggests a symphony for strings rather than a chamber work. During this time Bax had been rather half-heartedly tinkering with an opera, but although he wrote a five act drama under the title *Déirdre*, very little music was written, and much of what was finally appeared in orchestral dress in the trilogy of tone poems he called *Eire* – individually entitled *Into the Twilight*, *In the Faery Hills* and *Roscatha*. Although it is persuasive to try to see here characteristic elements of the middle and closing movements of Bax's later symphonies, really we have to look to *Roscatha*'s immediate successor, the extended choral and orchestral setting of a pastoral scene from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, to which he gave the title *Enchanted Summer*, to see a first convincing pre-echo of Bax's later approach to the symphony. In three sections but playing continuously, *Enchanted Summer* not only demonstrates Bax's early command of the impressionistic orchestra but also contains an intriguing foretaste both of the opening of the tone poem *Tintagel* and the climax of the Sixth Symphony.

Bax's most successful works during the Great War were orchestral tone poems, including the sequence of scores by which he is usually remembered – *The Garden of Fand* (1913, orch 1916), *Summer Music* (1917, orch 1921), *November Woods* (1917) (all recorded on Chandos ABRD 1066), and, preceding the latter, *Tintagel*

(1917, orch 1919). These all had autobiographical overtones, as did the massive three movement *Piano Quintet* (1914/15) – really a symphony manqué – and the extended *Symphonic Variations* (1916/18) for piano and orchestra.

When it came, Bax did not actually conceive his First Symphony (1921/22) as an orchestral work at all, but as a piano sonata. Almost immediately he orchestrated the outer movements, and wrote a new slow one conceived in orchestral terms. Within two years he was at work on a Second Symphony, though it was not completed until March 1926; the Third followed in 1928/29. Yet he was not really thought of as a symphonist in the minds of his British audiences until the 1930s. The Second and Third symphonies were both first heard in London in 1930, the year he was working on two further works on a similar scale, the *Winter Legends* for piano and orchestra (completed 3 April 1930) and the Fourth Symphony (completed in full score by February 1931). Three further symphonies followed in 1932, 1934 and 1939, but by the Second World War Bax had said almost all he had to say. His knighthood and his Mastership of the Musick acknowledged past achievements rather than someone who was still a force on the musical scene. He died in 1953.

### Tintagel

Bax first met Harriet Cohen, the pianist, in 1912. During the Great War he was increasingly drawn to her, until by 1917 the necessity of having to choose between her and his wife and children was an overriding preoccupation. In August and September 1917 the lovers spent over six weeks together at Tintagel, in North Cornwall. In October Bax wrote his tone-poem *Tintagel*, which ostensibly evokes the ruined castle and the Atlantic, with overtones of the historical associations of the place. Clearly he was also celebrating his own passion in surging sea-music of memorable brilliance and vigour, as he had already done in the earlier ocean-evocation *The Garden of Fand*. *Tintagel* was not orchestrated immediately, for in November he wrote the even more personal nature poem *November Woods* which evokes his torment at having to choose between family and Harriet in terms of stormy nature. In fact Bax did not leave home until the following March, but the orchestration of *Tintagel* had to wait almost another year. When it was finished Bax inscribed the manuscript to 'Darling Tania with love from Arnold'. (Tania was the name by which Harriet Cohen was known to all in her circle.)



The published score is prefaced by the following programme:

*'Though detailing no definite programme this work is intended to evoke a tone-picture of the castle-crowned cliff of Tintagel, and more particularly the wide distances of the Atlantic as seen from the cliffs of Cornwall on a sunny but not windless summer day. In the middle section of the piece it may be imagined that with the increasing tumult of the sea arise memories of the historical and legendary association of the place, especially those connected with King Arthur, King Mark, and Tristram and Iseult. Regarding the last named, it will be noticed that at the climax of the more literary division of the work there is a brief reference to one of the subjects in the first act of "Tristram".'*

The quotation from *Tristan* is the chromatically drooping 'Sick Tristan' motif which is first referred to on page 18 of Bax's published score, where it is played by solo oboe and solo violin, marked 'plaintive and wistful'. It reappears in various orchestral guises, mainly on high strings, during the middle section of the work.

**The Fourth Symphony** was written in the Autumn and Winter of 1930. It is dedicated to Paul Corder, the composer son of Bax's composition teacher at the RAM, Frederick Corder, and one of Bax's companions in Dresden in spacious Edwardian days. (The dedication was probably a 'thank you' for the work that Corder and Marjorie McTavish, music teacher and mutual friend, did on the score, clarifying and simplifying Bax's notation.) It was first performed in Los Angeles conducted by Basil Cameron in March 1932, and in London conducted by (Sir) Malcolm Sargent in December 1932. Published in 1932, it was later Bax's first orchestral work to appear in miniature score, in 1934.

Like *Tintagel* more than a dozen years before, this symphony marks the initial high point of a love affair, which again finds subconscious expression through the imagery of Atlantic breakers. The sea may be heard in many of Bax's scores – he even admitted to its appearance in the Sonata for Two Pianos – and it forms a constant background to many of his Irish short stories written over the pseudonym of 'Dermot O'Byrne'. For example this evocation from the story called 'Ancient Dominions':

*'From the depths arose the narcotic whispering of the tide, to some souls the most moving music that ever awakened the nostalgia for beauty unrevealed or lost on the*

*wind . . . At the edge of the sea the drowsy waves broke in a long thin crest of foam, rising and subsiding rhythmically with the beat of the tide, and a little beyond this the weltering turmoil of the bar glared under the moon. The white gleam of it was so sharp that it seemed at any moment about to burst into some intenser expression than was possible to light alone, as if it must break into some trumpet tone shrilling above the heavy crash of the surf. Further out the Atlantic dreamed impenetrably, an enormous grey allurements, tender and terrible.'*

Bax first stayed in Morar on the West Coast of Scotland in the Winter of 1928. Returning in 1930 he subsequently went there every year in the wintertime using it as a retreat where he could work uninterrupted. Mary Gleaves, his companion for the last 25 years of his life, accompanied him on these sojourns, which ended in 1940. In the quiet of Morar Bax brought to their finished form works he had started elsewhere, and the first substantial score to be written thus was the Fourth Symphony. Part of the first movement was worked out at his Irish refuge of Glencolumcille, but the seascapes that he essays in this music are mainly to do with the natural grandeur of the coast and islands of the Western Highlands in late Autumn and Winter, like Glencolumcille still a place 'lorded by the Atlantic'.

Throughout the 1930s the critic Ernest Newman made no secret of the fact that although he liked and admired Bax's music, 'the connection of the ideas sometimes evaded me. As with all music of this type, we are conscious of something having gone on in the composer's mind that would be clearer to us for a little verbal explanation.' As he became older Bax was increasingly unwilling to essay other than purely musical explanations of his works. Yet in his letters he made clear what motivated his art, writing to Arthur Benjamin 'the only music that can last is that which is the outcome of one's emotional reactions to the ultimate realities of Life, Love and Death'. To Mary Gleaves he wrote of 'ordinary life and all the grimness which most of my music deals with'.

In fact, the Fourth Symphony is a hedonistic and triumphant interlude between the more serious autobiographical works that frame it. For this reason it demands the best possible recorded sound, brilliant playing, and, in the outer movements an organ that makes its presence felt to underline the most exultant moments of this pagan celebration. This digital recording may thus be the first adequate opportunity many music lovers have had to properly assess the work.



The first movement launches straight into the opening theme which stamps out its *allegro moderato* over an Eb pedal coloured by the organ's 16ft stop, which unambiguously underlines the key and at the same time gives a sense of some deep stirring or undertow in this vigorous evocation of the autumn sea at flood tide on a breezy, sunny day. Quickly a second idea appears, consisting of upward rushing semiquavers that fall back and then rush up again, still evoking the incoming sea. A pendant theme follows rising on a 'Scotch snap' only to fall back again. It will be elaborated later into a long *allegretto semplice* tune. Finally the first subject group is completed with an idea in running semi-quavers and a dotted motif that is repeated round the orchestra with strongly rhythmic decoration, and if this is still sea-music we experience a passing autumn squall with material from the opening ideas again in evidence.

The long *cantabile espressivo* tune that now follows is first played by solo oboe accompanied by just 4 clarinets. Quickly a second tune appears on flutes accompanied – a typical Baxian touch this – by cor anglais, harp, and four solo celli playing soft chords. These two slow tunes constitute the second subject group of the first movement and are subject to lyrical working in the strings and the wind. Also worth watching out for are typical evocative but enigmatic slow interludes, as if the composer while revelling in the physical impact of his autumn ocean has sensed that the 'veil of enchantment' might have been about to lift, only for the mood to elude him as the sea renews its physical presence with crashing waves.

In the slow movement, even more than in the first, Bax writes sea music reminiscent in its technique of earlier scores in this vein. Perhaps most surprising is the ghost of Bax's 'dreamy and passionate' piano solo, *A Romance*. The principal falling motif of that piece appears throughout the music. Three bars before cue 21, towards the end, Bax suddenly introduces an extended quotation from it, starting at the fourth bar of p.6 of the published score. This orchestral realisation continues for 26 bars.

The opening of the last movement has a greater impact even than the first with its fortissimo muted trumpets trilling in triads, and slashing string chords. The music already has the hint of a great pagan march about it. A quiet interlude intervenes, and it is interesting to note how Bax can allow his brilliant musical tapestry to subside onto just one instrument – or in one place flute and harp. A climax ensues, and then after a further interlude Bax launches his triumphal march, which in a dozen

pages of pagan splendour, with the organ underscoring the mood, brings this happy and invigorating work to a resounding close.

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**Bryden Thomson** was born in Scotland. After studying at the Royal Scottish Academy and in Europe with Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt and Igor Markevitch, he spent two years at McMaster University in Canada. He returned to Scotland to take up an appointment as assistant conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra, and from 1968 to 1973 was Principal Conductor of the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra which he took on a highly acclaimed European tour.

In addition, Bryden Thomson has conducted the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Scottish National, Scottish Chamber and English Sinfonia Orchestras; for the South African Broadcasting Commission; the Göteborg Symphony Orchestra and Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra in Stockholm. His work in the operatic field has included posts with Norwegian Opera in Oslo, Scottish Opera, and the BBC, for whom he has recorded several operas.

In 1977 Bryden Thomson was appointed Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra, and in January 1979 Principal Conductor of the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra.

**The Ulster Orchestra** began as a chamber sized ensemble in 1966 and was enlarged in 1980/81 incorporating players from the disbanded BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra, and its reputation has increased enormously as a result of the Chandos series of recordings of the music of Hamilton Harty and Arnold Bax.

The Ulster Orchestra receives major financial assistance from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the British Broadcasting Corporation, Gallaher Ltd. and Belfast City Council.

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This recording was mastered and edited on Chandos Complete PCM Digital System. This system is superior to conventional analog (tape recorder) recording in dynamic range, signal to noise and distortion.

##### Equipment used:

- Schoeps & Neumann microphones
- New classical mixing console—State of the Art specification designed and built by Chandos
- Sony PCM 1610 Digital processor
- DAE-1100 Digital electronic editor
- Digital information stored in BVU 200A recorders

Although analog tape recorders have been remarkably improved today, they are still limited by a number of drawbacks resulting in distortion and dynamic range limitations. These limits are inherent in the tape, heads, and other mechanical factors, and it is virtually impossible to eliminate them completely.

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- Wide dynamic range ● Flat frequency response regardless of input level
- Extremely low distortion ● Superior transient characteristics
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**Chandos**

**CHAN 8312**

**SIR  
ARNOLD BAX**  
(1883–1953)

**SYMPHONY NO. 4**

- 1 I – *Allegro moderato* (17:13)  
2 II – *Lento moderato* (13:45)  
3 III – *Allegro – Tempo di marcia trionfale* (10:35)

4 **TINTAGEL**  
(14:57)

TT = 57:05

**ULSTER ORCHESTRA**

Leader  
RICHARD HOWARTH

**BRYDEN THOMSON**  
Conductor

DDD



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