



CHAMPS HILL
RECORDS

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Emma Johnson *clarinet*

John Lenehan *piano*



PROKOFIEV | HINDEMITH | ROTA | LUTOSŁAWSKI | MESSIAEN

For this disc I have selected musicians who were composing with the Second World War as an inescapable backdrop. Some reflected the war in their music, just as intriguingly others didn't dwell on its horror.

Paul Hindemith found that his music was by turns approved of and then banned by the Nazi regime. With a Jewish wife and many Jewish friends, he was bound to become a target and eventually he was forced to escape Germany. The 1939 Clarinet Sonata is haunted by the shadow of war; its pastoral opening interrupted by military motifs, its mischievous *scherzo* continually beaten into submission. I find the slow movement one of the most despairing pieces in all of Hindemith's work and the little *rondo* that follows never quite manages to turn the mood around.

Although written some 20 years later, Lutosławski's *Dance Preludes* are still unmistakably the products of a post war



world with a bleakness in the slow dances that wouldn't previously have been thinkable. Lutosławski's father was shot by the Nazis for organising protests and Lutosławski himself fled a prisoner of war camp. He does offer us hope in the vigorous, virile fast dances, but even here we can't escape a sense of splintering disharmony when in *Dance Three* the music fractures as clarinet and piano appear to go their separate ways for a while.

Prokofiev was sent to a safe haven outside Moscow during the Second World War where he lived with his mistress in safety if not luxury. His elegantly neoclassical Sonata Op.94 (1943) may at first seem untouched by war, but aggression continually breaks through the cool surface beauty. Relief comes in the form of the final movement's Russian tableau which bursts with irrepressible life.

By contrast, the Italian, Nino Rota, writing in 1945 at the end of war, seems to be intent on beguiling us with a vision of hope for the future. Olivier Messiaen's message, too, is positive. Although his *Abîme des oiseaux* was written in a prisoner of war camp, it depicts both slow-burning desolation as well as the beauty of birdsong, rainbows and man's ability to aspire to a brave new world. This phrase, brave new world, whether used by Huxley or Shakespeare, has always been equivocal however; we can never erase the dark shadow of war, but perhaps we can learn a way forward by listening to the artists who lived under it.

Emma Johnson

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

SONATA FOR FLUTE AND PIANO

arr. for clarinet and piano by Emma Johnson

1	Andantino	08'44
2	Allegretto scherzando	05'36
3	Andante	04'21
4	Allegro con brio	07'22

PAUL HINDEMITH (1895–1963)

SONATA FOR CLARINET AND PIANO

5	Massig Bewegt	05'13
6	Lebhaft	02'39
7	Sehr Langsam	07'03
8	Kleines Rondo, gemächlich	02'46

NINO ROTA (1911–1979)

SONATA IN RE

9	Allegretto scorrevole	04'56
10	Andante	04'37
11	Allegro scorrevole	03'43

WITOLD LUTOSŁAWSKI (1913–1994)

DANCE PRELUDES

12	Allegro molto	01'03
13	Andantino	02'57
14	Allegro giocoso	01'13
15	Andante	03'44
16	Allegro molto	01'46

OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908–1992)

17	ABÎME DES OISEAUX	06'42
18	VOCALISE-ÉTUDE	04'17

Total playing time: 78'46

Produced & Engineered by Raphael Mouterde

Edited & Mastered by Raphael Mouterde

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Sergei Prokofiev began composing his Flute Sonata in D major, Op.92 in 1942 while in wartime exile in the Caucasus (the Soviet authorities had removed several of their leading writers, artists and composers well away from the areas being fought over, further to the West). It was completed the following year and premiered in the Beethoven Hall of the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow on 7 December 1943 by Nikolai Kharkovsky (flute) with Sviatoslav Richter at the piano. Shortly afterwards, at the prompting of David Oistrakh, Prokofiev transcribed it as his Second Violin Sonata as flautists seemed to be in no hurry to take it up. This violin version (Op.94 bis) is perhaps more frequently encountered in the concert hall than the flute version, simply because the number of solo violinists far outnumbers that of flautists, but the original version has become a firm favourite with the latter. Emma Johnson's own arrangement of this work for clarinet is highly idiomatic, and also perhaps allows the wind instrument more force in the darker passages than the flute is capable of.

The Op.94 Sonata emerged immediately in the wake of Prokofiev's three powerful piano sonatas, Nos.6–8, often collectively known as the 'War Sonatas', and while he was at work on his opera *War and Peace*; but there is little hint of the ongoing war in the Flute Sonata, which is rather if anything blithe and bucolic, imbued with a mixture of lyrical warmth and a spirit of playfulness. It might be thought of as the piano sonatas' antithesis, for the composer was undoubtedly still at the height of his powers as he wrote it, and the result is an absolute classic. The opening melody of the first movement is one of Prokofiev's most exquisite inspirations, a song with a touch of melancholy that seems to float lazily in the air. A spiky transition leads to a second subject scarcely less dreamlike in its near-carefree melodic evolutions. Both subjects are repeated before Prokofiev plunges into an altogether more rhythmic and forward-driving development, but this is comparatively short-lived and the movement ends in the Arcadian realms in which it began.

A scampering *scherzo* follows, prompting the clarinet to some cartwheeling *arpeggios* and a plethora of witty dialogue; a sentimental-seeming trio section is soon

disrupted by sudden bursts of humour and athletic displays from the clarinet. The *scherzo* is reprised and has a hilarious *coda*. With the F major slow movement we are with Prokofiev at his most intimate and lyrical: the main melody might have stepped from his great ballet score for *Romeo and Juliet*. The writing becomes more agitated, as if a chill wind is sweeping through the music, but the main melody surmounts this and maintains its lyrical song. In the closing bars the music turns ghostly and sombre.

Dark thoughts, however, are dispelled by the assertive, strutting *finale* with its bouncy second theme. The piano introduces a third idea which leads the clarinet into a series of bravura curlicues of melody. All three ideas are reprised and developed, introducing a new melody that harks back to the lyric idyll of the first movement, making sure the sonata does not neglect its soulful origins. Then the strutting, japing *finale* music strikes in again. Perhaps the movement as a whole is more defiant than light-hearted, but it projects a kind of sardonic confidence that seems to say, especially in the wild rejoicing of the *coda*, that the paradise outlined in the first movement is possible, but not without a fight, and at a price – but one that is worth paying.

Paul Hindemith severed his last ties as a German resident immediately after the premiere of his ballet *Nobilissima Visione* in London. Crossing the border into Switzerland (not without hindrance from the Nazi customs authorities), he settled there from September 1938 until February 1940, when he emigrated to the USA. If 'settled' is the right word – financial pressures dictated several concert tours, to Italy, France, Belgium, Holland and the USA. Nevertheless this was an immensely productive period. As well as working on a projected *Brueghel* ballet which became the piano-concerto-like *Four Temperaments*, he produced a veritable stream of instrumental sonatas: one each for horn, trumpet, harp, violin, viola and clarinet, continuing a series originally begun in 1937 with sonatas for organ, piano duet,

oboe and bassoon. He seems to have been reassessing the expressive potential of the various solo instruments; and indeed several of these sonatas possess a tension and drama very different from the harmonious serenity of *Nobilissima Visione*. To a friend he confided that he was writing the sonatas as a preparation for a 'great work' – the opera *Die Harmonie der Welt*, on the life of the astronomer Johannes Kepler. This Hindemith viewed as his *chef-d'oeuvre*, and intended to write it soon (he had already written the libretto), but it would not be until 1955 that he was finally able to commit it to paper.

The Clarinet Sonata in B flat, completed at the end of September 1939, shortly before Hindemith left Europe entirely, seems to have been the last of this series. The first movement initially seems leisurely and lyrical, but is always kept on the move by the contrapuntal interplay of clarinet and piano, and is apt to stray into distant tonal areas, with a touch of melancholy. A more assertive, rather march-like tune strikes in as a dramatic contrast, so that when the leisurely opening music returns we view it in a different, rather more sombre light, even as it lays itself to peaceful rest. Next, a lively, strutting *scherzo*, presenting plenty of opportunities for the clarinetist to show off their skill throughout the range of the instrument. There is a little, sinuous trio, neatly dovetailing back into the *scherzo* music, which is both compressed and more aggressive at its reappearance. The heart of the sonata is, however, the slow movement, *Sehr Langsam*, an uneasy meditation which seems to take us back to the world of the opera *Mathis der Maler*. Grave and melancholic, it has the clarinet spinning long lines that retreat into a sense of desolate solitude. A quietly rippling central section increases the air of mystery, and when the opening theme returns it is with a stern dignity, rising to a passionate climax. As the music evanesces in an elegiac *coda*, one cannot but feel that this movement stands for something very personal – perhaps a lament for the past, or even an anticipated farewell to Europe. Such thoughts seem immediately dispelled by the concluding *Kleines Rondo*, a movement at once breezy and purposeful (the main

theme is a kind of march), which shows Hindemith at his most inventive in a short space. The more mellifluous episodes are a perfect foil to the main theme, and the unexpected, downbeat ending leaves the audience hungry for more.

Time-travelling seamlessly between Mozart and *La Strada*, the concert music of Nino Rota is hard to pigeon-hole (a 20th-century Rossini? an Italian Poulenc, perhaps – but with an admixture of neoclassical Busoni?) but very easy to enjoy. Wit abounds, sentiment is worn unashamedly on the sleeve, but everything is trimly turned out, beautifully scored, and nothing outstays its welcome. Something of an infant prodigy, Rota studied with Alfredo Casella, among others, but seems to have decided early on to give aggressive modernity a miss. Though most widely famed as a composer of film scores, Nino Rota was active throughout his career in most of the conventional genres, and handled them with equal skill and genial aplomb. From the close connection between film and concert hall in his output we may conclude either that in his film scores Rota refused to relax his standards, or that cheerful eclecticism was his natural bent, equally suited to screen, stage or concert hall.

Rota's Clarinet Sonata in D was written in 1945. It bears few if any outward signs of that dramatic year in Italy's history; rather it seems like a dream of another, better world. In the *Allegretto scorrevole* first movement, the unforced outpouring of melody seems timeless, or rather not rooted in any particular time. Clarinet and piano caress each other's lines: beauty of tone is what is important here, with buckets of melodic charm, the sensuous pleasure of wide-ranging modulation and of comfortingly familiar cadences. Weightless as a balloon floating in a clear sky, Rota's melodic line for the clarinet opens up – with mature, highly developed art – a world of almost childlike pleasure. The central *Andante*, conceived it seems in bosky shadow, is perhaps more serious, certainly more melancholic, but its sentiment is always contained within a fine elegance of utterance. At the centre occurs a kind of broken recitative, but this too is subsumed into the overall mood,

which is perhaps darkest at this point. Like the first movement, the last is marked *scorrevole*, 'scurrying', and perhaps bears the epithet better. Here again, though, we have an unforced, apparently spontaneous flow of melody that, surprisingly, in one episode, lets rip with wild clarinet trills and massive, almost Brahmsian piano writing. This looks forward to the fine flourish of the *coda*, which ends the sonata almost more decisively than it seems to require.

Witold Lutosławski described his *5 Dance Preludes* as his 'farewell to folklore', and indeed they mark the end of a period from the late 1940s to the mid 1950s in which he had been able to largely avoid criticism and persecution from the ruling Stalinist regime in Poland by turning to folk sources for his music, either directly or, as in the Preludes, in subtly sublimated form. The great achievement of this period was of course his monumental and now world-famous Concerto for Orchestra, to which the Preludes, by turns blithe and haunting, form a kind of downbeat epilogue. Written in 1954–55, they were premiered in Warsaw on 15 February 1955 in this original form for clarinet and piano. But Lutosławski subsequently produced two other versions: one for clarinet, harp, piano, percussion and string orchestra (1955) and one for clarinet with wind quintet and string quartet (1959). In these various versions the *Dance Preludes* have become one of his best-loved works. They are all based on Polish dance rhythms, if not on actual folk tunes. Basically, the odd-numbered Preludes are fast, witty and capricious, while Nos. 2 and 4 are more soulful melodic inspirations. Terse and pithy, they are all very short, but all show an intimate knowledge of the capabilities of the clarinet in its every register.

Olivier Messiaen's *Vocalise-Étude* was originally conceived for wordless voice and is an early work (from 1935), but one that signalled his growing eminence among the younger generation of French composers. It was commissioned for a collection of such vocalises being put together by A. L. Hettich, a celebrated voice teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, who successfully invited such luminaries as Ravel and

Rachmaninov to contribute to a series of volumes published yearly by Leduc. This short, ecstatic work sounds equally well on the clarinet, and is already characteristic of the composer in its whiff of orientalism, its rainbow harmonies, its melodic line soaring somewhere between earth and heaven. It is interesting to note that many years later Messiaen made an orchestral version as a movement of his last work, the *Concert à Quatre*.

At the outbreak of World War II Messiaen was called up into the French army, but due to his poor eyesight served as a medical auxiliary rather than a soldier. In May 1940 he was captured at Verdun and spent two years as a prisoner of war, held in the German POW camp Stalag VIII-A at Görlitz in Silesia. It was here that he wrote his only large-scale chamber work, the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the End of Time) for violin, clarinet, cello and piano. The instrumentation was chosen because his fellow-prisoners included a clarinetist, a violinist and a cellist (whose instrument, provided by the German officers, was missing one string), and they – with Messiaen at a battered upright piano – gave the premiere of the Quartet in the camp in January 1941, in freezing winter conditions, to an audience of 5,000 prisoners and their guards. 'Never', he wrote long afterwards, 'have I been listened to with such attention and understanding.'

Considering himself and his fellow-prisoners to be living through apocalyptic times, Messiaen conceived the work as a meditation on the passage in the biblical Book of Revelations in which a mighty angel descends from heaven to proclaim, 'There Shall Be Time No Longer' as the announcement of the end of all things. The third movement, *Abîme des oiseaux* (Abyss of the Birds), is for unaccompanied clarinet and features transcriptions of birdsong. Messiaen wrote of this piece: 'The abyss is Time, with its sadnesses and tediums. The birds are the opposite of Time; they are our desire for light, for stars, for rainbows, and for jubilant outpourings of song.'

Emma Johnson is one of few clarinetists to have established a busy solo career which has taken her to major European, American and Asian venues as well as to Africa and Australasia.

Her recording of sonatas by Brahms and Mendelssohn with John Lenehan was described as “definitive... triumphant... a landmark disc” in *The Observer* and followed on from her Classical chart-topping successes: *Voyage* and *The Mozart Album* on the Universal label. She has an extensive discography on the A.S.V, Nimbus and Naxos labels, including a much-admired recording of the Finzi Concerto, nominated for a Gramophone Award, and *Pastoral*, chosen as CD of the Year by *BBC Music Magazine*.

Emma Johnson has appeared as a soloist with many of the world’s leading orchestras in repertoire that includes all the major clarinet works as well as pieces written especially for her by John Dankworth, Will Todd and Michael Berkeley amongst others.

Emma is also in great demand as a collaborative artist; tours in recent years have included performances with the Takacs and Con Tempo quartets, the pianists Pascal Rogé and John Lill, the cellist Julian Lloyd-Webber and sopranos Lesley Garrett and Elizabeth Watts. She is director of Emma Johnson and Friends, a versatile wind and string group, and in a recent development of her career has been invited to devise concert series on themes such as French music, Schubert and Brahms.

An exciting collaboration with composer Jonathan Dove has seen Emma working with children in workshops and performances to recreate the story of *The Pied Piper*. She enjoys working with young people and has been appointed Visiting Professor at the Leeds College of Music where she will give annual master classes.

Renowned for her lyrical freshness and spontaneous expressivity, Emma has also revealed an idiomatic feeling for jazz, blues and Klezmer in recent years. She arranges music of many styles for the clarinet; books of her compositions and arrangements have been published by Chester Music, Faber Music and Kevin Mayhew.

Emma’s TV appearances range from a recital for Sky Arts, to prime-time chat shows and gala concerts. She featured in the Channel 4 documentary about the late Sir John Dankworth and played the popular hit theme tune for *The Victorian Kitchen Garden* (winning a Novello Award) for the BBC. Her radio work includes Artist of the Week for both Radio 3 and Classic FM, and she has presented feature programmes about Gerald Finzi and John Milton for Radio 4, both chosen as Pick of the Week.

Emma grew up in London. In 1984 she won BBC Young Musician of the Year and was later to become a winner of the Young Concert Artists Auditions in New York. These successes launched her career whilst she was still at school but she decided to study Music and English at Cambridge University before embarking fulltime on a musical path. A Patron of ClicSargent (www.clicsargent.org.uk), the childhood cancer charity, Emma was also the first woman to be made an Honorary Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge and was honoured by the Queen with an MBE in 1996.

Emma plays an instrument made by Peter Eaton.

“Emma Johnson has realised what lies at the heart of music-making when it is at its best: she does not just perform but uses the music to communicate something wonderful.”

Jussi Mattila writing in the *Savon Sanomat*, Helsinki, November 2011

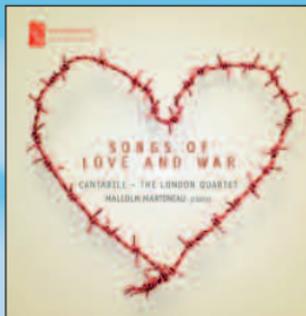
JOHN LENEHAN piano

Praised by the *New York Times* for his “great flair and virtuosity” and the *London Times* – “a masterly recital” – John Lenehan’s performances and recordings have been acclaimed throughout the world. He has regularly appeared with leading British orchestras and his innovative recital programmes often include film projection and jazz repertoire. In a performing career spanning more than 25 years John has also collaborated with many of today’s leading instrumentalists and is recognised as one of the foremost accompanists and chamber musicians of today. During the past few years he has appeared in major concert halls in Amsterdam, Vienna, Salzburg, New York, Washington, Toronto, Seoul, Shanghai and Tokyo.

John Lenehan is also active as a composer and has written and arranged for Angelika Kirchschrager, Nigel Kennedy, Nicola Benedetti, Tasmin Little and Emma Johnson. His compositions are published by Faber, Novello and Schott.



ALSO AVAILABLE...



CHRC074

SONGS OF LOVE AND WAR CANTABILE – THE LONDON QUARTET MALCOLM MARTINEAU - piano

Well known as entertainers, the four singers of Cantabile here share some more serious and hauntingly beautiful songs, centred around the 100th anniversary of the start of “The Great War”. The disc seeks to capture the heartfelt emotion of the time: young men sent off to the front, and those they left behind.

With works from 17 composers, both *a cappella* and accompanied by Malcolm Martineau, this is a programme sung from the heart, inspired by the dual themes of love and war.



CHRC064

MEDTNER/RACHMANINOFF/PROKOFIEV SOFYA GULYAK - piano

Leeds International Piano Competition winner Sofya Gulyak is the only woman to have achieved this distinction, since which she has appeared all over the world to great acclaim. A unique artist in every respect, Champs Hill Records is delighted to release her debut solo recording, featuring Medtner’s *Four Skazi* (Fairy Tales) and *Tragic Sonata*; his close friend Rachmaninoff’s *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*; and the first of Prokofiev’s ‘War Sonatas’ (the pinnacle of his music for piano), the Sonata No.6 in A major, Op.82.