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ALAN RAWSTHORNE

(1905 -1971)

- Bagatelles** (1938) (6'07")
- 1 I *Allegro* (1'05")
 - 2 II *Allegretto* (1'39")
 - 3 III *Presto non assai* (1'11")
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- Four Romantic Pieces** (1953) (9'51")
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 - 11 III *Allegro quasi Presto* (1'24")
 - 12 IV *Adagio maestoso* (2'14")

BERNARD STEVENS

(1916 -1983)

- Five Inventions Op. 14** (1950) (9'12")
- 13 I *Allegro* (0'48")
 - 14 II *Adagio* (2'38")
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- 18 **Ballad Op. 17** (1951) (10'18")
- 19 **Fantasia on "Giles Farnaby's
Dreame"** Op.22 (1953) (13'06")
- 20 **Sonata in One Movement**
Op. 25 (1954) (15'40")
- (75'08")

James Gibb, piano

The above individual timings will normally each include two pauses. One before the beginning of each movement or work, and one after the end

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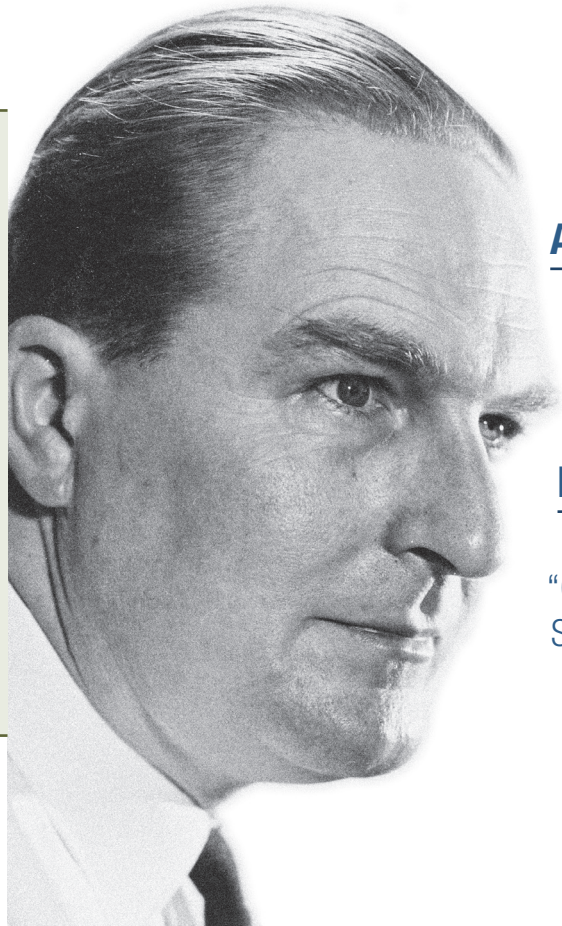
ALAN RAWSTHORNE

Four Romantic Pieces
Bagatelles
Sonatina

BERNARD STEVENS

Fantasia on
"Giles Farnaby's Dreame"
Sonata in One Movement
Five Inventions
Ballad

James Gibb, piano



ALAN RAWSTHORNE (1905-1971) was one of the most distinctive British composers of his generation. His output has been celebrated chiefly for orchestral works, including three impressive symphonies, and a significant volume of chamber and instrumental music. He was also a fine pianist, winning a prize whilst he was a third year student at the Royal Manchester (now Royal Northern) College of Music and going on to study in Poland in the summer of 1930 with Busoni's pupil Egon Petri. Though his most substantial and often performed keyboard works are those he wrote for piano and other instruments, such as the two piano concertos, the Quintet for piano and wind and Violin Sonata, he also produced a number of accomplished pieces for solo piano, most of which, including the three works featured on this disc, date from the first half of his career; a notable exception being the technically challenging *Ballade* of 1967, an impressive coda to his considerable achievements in the medium.

Together with his earliest major orchestral statement, the masterly *Symphonic Studies* (1938), Rawsthorne's set of piano pieces entitled **Four Bagatelles** is one of his first entirely representative works, serving to secure his reputation. Completed in July 1938, they were written during a family holiday spent at the Norfolk home of a friend, the composer Patrick Hadley, and are dedicated to pianist and fellow RMCM student Gordon Green, who premièred them in a recital broadcast for Oslo Radio on 18 August 1942. Though, as their collective title indicates, they are essentially miniatures, they form an authentic cycle of pieces founded on a use of common intervals, in particular the major thirds and fourths presented in the opening bars of the first *Bagatelle*; this is a pithy, lively and characteristically droll *Allegro*, whose scope and range belies its abbreviated length. In contrast, the second *Bagatelle*, following without a break, is a delicate and wistful dance in Siciliano rhythm, while the third is a spectral, fleet-footed scherzo; its central episode recalls the main theme of the first *Bagatelle*. Strikingly, the fourth and last *Bagatelle* is the slowest and gravest of the set, starting out as a two-part invention. Florid and imposing, it develops into an eloquent lament, providing an unexpectedly sober conclusion to an otherwise buoyant and insouciant set.

between major and minor. This material is recalled in a short coda, now presented in a richer, more sonorous texture written on three staves. A further occurrence of the sonata's chordal theme forms a transition to the *Allegro* finale, a concise movement in jig time with a strong folk-like element. A powerful and trenchant coda in a slower tempo restates the chordal theme one last time, now transposed from the opening E flat minor into the key of A major, its antipodes in terms of tonality and indicative of the huge distance the sonata (and the listener) has travelled since those crucial massive opening chords.

PAUL CONWAY

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Recording dates: Rawsthorne: August 1958; Stevens: December 1959

Recording Producer & Engineer: Richard Itter

Digital Remastering Engineer: Simon Gibson

Other works by ALAN RAWSTHORNE available on Lyrita:

Symphonies 1, 2 & 3

London Philharmonic Orchestra | BBC Symphonic Orchestra

conducted by Sir John Pritchard | Nicholas Braithwaite | Norman Del MarSRCD.291

Overture Street Corner, Piano Concertos 1 & 2, *Symphonic Studies*

Malcolm Binns, piano, London Philharmonic Orchestra | London Symphony Orchestra

conducted by Sir John Pritchard | Nicholas BraithwaiteSRCD.255

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C minor is launched by a furtive-sounding *sempre legato* descending line, originating from the final phrase of Farnaby's theme. This prefaces a simple, but lyrical presentation of the theme in its original harmony with octave doublings, followed by eight diverse, strongly characterised variations. The first five of these follow in quick succession; they are a flowing *Allegro*; a fast moving carillon-chorale; a driving *moto perpetuo*; a delicate 2-part invention beginning ethereally in a soaring register and a terse and gruff scherzo. After this rapid sequence of laconic variants come three weightier, more substantial inventions: a canonic movement in the form of a *Siciliano*, a hushed *Adagio*, whose nocturne-like character is underlined by a rocking accompaniment and an introspective, impromptu-like and harmonically questing intermezzo. A climax is reached in the form of a brief, virtuosic and spontaneous-sounding cadenza in octaves, after which the opening descending line is recalled, leading to a concluding fugal section where, in an expanded recapitulation, the theme is developed contrapuntally and embellished by fastidious ornamentations. This extended coda gains in intensity, paving the way for an emphatic conclusion to one of Stevens' most impressive, finely wrought works. In 1972 he undertook a version of it for chamber orchestra under the title of *Introduction, Variations and Fugue on a theme of Giles Farnaby*, Op.47.

The **Sonata in one movement** Op.25 was written in 1954 and dedicated to Clive Lythgoe, who first performed it at that year's Cheltenham Festival. One of Stevens' most compelling pieces, it commands attention from the outset with its head-on presentation of a robust, chromatically ascending chordal progression in eight-note block harmonies. This striking material, quickly culminating in a virtuosic downward plunging octave cascade, provides the thematic material for the rest of the sonata, including the opening section's spaciously conceived, epic first subject and the darting, airy secondary material. At the end of this first section, the chordal theme reappears, heralding the arrival of the haunting central *Adagio*, the emotional heart of the sonata. A ternary structure, it consists of two outer sections fashioned in counterpoint over a palindromic ground bass in two- and three-part writing, whilst the haunting central episode features treble and bass antiphony bridging a quietly pulsating, syncopated chordal accompaniment, gently and evocatively veering

Rawsthorne's first post-war work for solo piano, the **Sonatina** received its first performance at the Wigmore Hall on 9 April 1949 by James Gibb. The opening movement, marked *Allegro sostenuto e misterioso*, is implacably monothematic, based unswervingly on the initial rising five-note motif tracing a diminished fourth, also germane to the work's other movements. It begins cryptically with an equivocal, elusive air, quickly evolving into a more clearly defined theme with fluid, characteristic major-minor harmonies and driven by a vigorous nervous energy. The shadowy closing bars make explicit a slightly menacing atmosphere that pervades the whole movement. The succeeding nocturnal *Lento* was the first movement to be composed. It is an eloquent lament, goaded in its later stages by increasingly intrusive fluttering arabesques into a short-lived, but ardent climax. A deeply personal elegiac utterance, it was played (on the organ) at the composer's funeral service at Thaxted church. There follows a hushed, intermezzo-like *Allegro con malinconia* scherzo, loose-limbed, but unsmiling. After a more vivid (but still muted) trio-like section, laced with broken chords, the tone becomes even darker, and a baleful linking passage leads into the *Allegro con brio* finale. If the haunting *Lento* offers a perfect representation of the retrospective side of Rawsthorne's nature, the finale illustrates the forthright, approachable elements of his disposition with its bluff good humour, unabashed tunefulness and rhythmic élan, ending the *Sonatina* in a mood of bracing high spirits.

The set entitled **Four Romantic Pieces** was written for Alan Rawsthorne's former piano teacher Frank Merrick, who gave the première at a recital at the Wigmore Hall on 25 March 1953. The concert celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Merrick's London debut and the Four Romantic Pieces were composed specifically for the occasion, making references to composers of the Romantic era for whom Rawsthorne and Merrick shared an enthusiasm, and taking account of the specific strengths and qualities of the performer. The first piece, a real concert study in the manner of Chopin, begins with an eloquent, solemn *Lento* introduction consisting of an ominous-sounding version of the main theme before launching into a brilliant, tempestuous *Allegro molto*. There is a momentary return to the introduction's solemn, reflective rendering of the theme before three forceful closing bars burst in,

finishing the argument decisively. In contrast, the following barcarolle-like *Allegretto* is a fragile utterance tinged with sadness, evoking one of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*. Its straightforward, lyrical melody and accompaniment is graced by more florid, gossamer-like textures in the middle section. The third piece, *Allegretto quasi presto*, is a brisk scherzo-like movement with a Hungarian flavour. Though generally spirited and waggish, it ends with a sudden, forceful closing cadence whose two-against-three rhythm brings into focus the vaguely Brahmsian qualities of the piece. Baroque in its rhetorical grandeur and use of dotted rhythms, the closing *Adagio maestoso* makes a noble, declamatory epilogue to the set; wide-spread chords (written, organ-like, over three staves) enhance the sense of majesty and epic scale, despite the piece's overall brevity at just 19 bars in length. Though exhibiting conflicting harmonies with some atypically conspicuous bitonality during its stately progress, it ends the set serenely and unequivocally in C major.

Much the same as his older contemporary Alan Rawsthorne, BERNARD STEVENS (1916-1983) excelled in writing music for orchestra or chamber ensembles, yet his most striking works for solo piano, such as the *Sonata* and the *Fantasia* featured on this release may be numbered amongst his best compositions. Also like Rawsthorne, Stevens was an accomplished pianist; both were taught by composer-pianist Frank Merrick, in Stevens' case at the Royal College of Music, where he also studied the piano with Arthur Benjamin. Stevens' output for keyboard, largely conceived with specific performers in mind, spans his entire creative career, from a *Toccatà and Fugue* (1936) and *Invention* (1937), both predating his formal opus one, to his last completed work, the *Concertante for two pianos* of 1982. Mention should also be made of his fine Piano Concerto of 1955, which he radically revised at the end of his life.

The set of *Five Inventions* Op.14 is dedicated to James Gibb, who premièred it at the Wigmore Hall on 9 May 1950. It was authorised by the composer for performance on either piano or harpsichord. A lean and sinewy two-part invention marked *Allegro* opens the set, characterised by a resolute *staccato* running bass line and a brisk theme for the right hand, which rarely strays from the short span of its initial phrase, and in the closing bars appears to make light of its own restrictions.

This is followed by a lyrical *Adagio* in A flat minor, pitting a wide-ranging *cantabile* melodic line against a chordal sequence, elements that swap hands and registers as the piece gradually unfolds. In the third invention, an E minor *Allegretto*, a carefree theme in 3/4 time is accompanied throughout by *staccato* long-limbed quavers. A second *Adagio*, in G minor, is more rhetorical than its predecessor and develops in more sustained phrases; the central section strikes an introspective note and there is a very short, muted cadenza, accelerating directly into the closing dissonant chords. Like the opening *Allegro*, the concluding *Presto* in F sharp takes the form of a two-part invention, whose curiously dislocated and syncopated quality is created by the expedient of setting the right hand closely echoing that of the left with the gap of a quaver between them. It makes a bold and breezy finale to a diverse and engaging set.

Stevens wrote two Ballads for piano, the first in 1951 and the second in 1969. **Ballad No.1** was written for Leonard Cassini, who gave the first performance of it in London for the B.B.C. Third Programme in 1953. A more considerable work than its title might suggest, it has the breadth and richness of a one-movement sonata in rondo form, though the composer, in a programme note, described it as a being linked with the form of a Scottish folk-ballad with a series of 'verses' and a 'refrain', intensifying on each repetition. Major-minor harmonies underline the palpable sense of unease in the opening four-bar refrain. A gloriously expansive, lyrical theme of Schubertian poise forms the second subject, leading into a vigorous, but agitated development section, a prodigious sequence of increasingly rhythmically resourceful and complex variations. After both refrain and second subject have received a varied recapitulation, the coda consists of a final statement of the refrain, adorned with trills.

The *Fantasia on Giles Farnaby's Dreame*, Op.22 for solo piano was composed in 1953 and dedicated to Denis Matthews who premièred it at that year's Cheltenham Festival. The original 24-bar piece by Giles Farnaby (c.1563-1640) entitled *Giles Farnaby's Dreame* was included in The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. In his *Improvisations on Virginal Pieces by Giles Farnaby* of 1939, Edmund Rubbra adapted it for small orchestra. Stevens' fantasia is a brilliant sequence of improvisational reinterpretations of Farnaby's original. A brief introduction in

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