



ENGLISH WORKS

for Viola and Orchestra

ARNOLD BAX
WILLIAM WALTON
RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

HONG-MEI XIAO, viola
BUDAPEST SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA MÁV
JÁNOS KOVÁCS, conductor

DE 3486





ENGLISH WORKS for Viola and Orchestra

SIR ARNOLD BAX

Phantasy for Viola and Orchestra (1920)

SIR WILLIAM WALTON

Concerto For Viola and Orchestra (1929 version)

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Suite For Viola and Orchestra (1933–34)

Hong-Mei Xiao, viola

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV
János Kovács, conductor

Total Playing Time: 73:10

Long eclipsed by its smaller sibling, the violin, the viola began to come into the light in the mid-20th century with newly composed repertoire and increased audience appreciation for its versatility and wide range—from the mellow, throaty depths of its lower register to the towering heights of its topmost notes.

If one person could be singled out as leading the way to the viola's new prominence as a solo instrument, it would be violist Lionel Tertis, who was a tireless proponent of the viola and the first virtuoso to gain a wide following for himself and his instrument. Tertis, who lived from 1876 to 1975, greatly expanded the repertoire for viola by encouraging composers to write compositions for the instrument, and he was behind all three works on this album.

Arnold Bax's lifelong fondness for the viola dates to his student years at the Royal Academy of Music; Lionel Tertis was professor of viola there while Bax was studying piano and composition. The **Phantasy for Viola and Orchestra** featured on this recording is dedicated to Tertis, and in addition, Bax composed an exceptionally fine sonata for viola and piano, which he and Tertis recorded.

Bax's music fell into neglect after his death in 1953. His compositions were considered modern during his lifetime—*The New Music Review* of 1918 described Bax's music as "perhaps the boldest from the point of view of harmonic innovation that any British composer has yet produced." Nevertheless, by the 1950s, Bax's

lush harmonies and soaring melodies set in a neo-Romantic context began to seem outdated as the fashion in classical music gave way to atonality and more complex approaches. Performances of the Phantasy are few, but recordings of Bax's music, including his symphonies and tone poems, are re-establishing his reputation. Today we appreciate Bax's music for its welcoming melodies and luxurious harmonies, for its distinctive orchestration and masterly instrumental writing, all evident in the Phantasy for Viola and Orchestra.

In three connected movements, beginning with a slow introduction, and played without pause, the Phantasy opens with a few short chords from the orchestra followed by a cadenza for the viola. Joined by the orchestra, the viola continues in an improvisatory manner, displaying the tonal range of the instrument and the virtuosity of the performer. Rhapsodic melodies and dramatic harmonies are interspersed with folk tunes, marches, and dances in which we can hear Bax's love of Irish traditions. Sections of the Phantasy are reminiscent of Irish fiddle music, and the finale even incorporates a reference to the Sinn Féin marching song.

As Lionel Tertis tells in his autobiography, *My Viola and I*, it was the eminent conductor Thomas Beecham who suggested to the young William Walton that he compose a viola concerto for Tertis. From our vantage point in the 21st century, there is nothing strident, grating,

or raucous about Walton's **Concerto for Viola and Orchestra**, one of the great concertos for the instrument. In 1929, however, the concerto was apparently problematic for Tertis, who refused to perform the work and immediately returned it to Walton. Tertis later referred to the incident with "shame and contrition," and comments that "the innovations in [Walton's] musical language, which now seem so logical and so truly in the mainstream of music, then struck me as far-fetched."

The premier performance was given in London by composer Paul Hindemith, who was also an accomplished violist. Walton tells that Tertis came to the first performance, "was completely won over, and he played the work whenever he had the chance."

The concerto's immediate success and enthusiastic reception by the press helped establish Walton as an important British composer at the forefront of new music. Walton drew from Romanticism and Impressionism, but he also incorporated new sounds, such as those that Hindemith was exploring in his compositions at the time.

Orchestrating a viola concerto needs to be done carefully. The violin, with its high-pitched sound, can easily project over the orchestra, and it is not an accident that violin concertos far outnumber viola and cello concertos. The viola's sound is more easily drowned out by the orchestra, and balancing the viola and orches-

tra is an important task of the composer of a viola concerto. In this recording, Hong-Mei Xiao's viola shines above the orchestra without apparent effort. Perhaps most easily heard in the last movement, the viola's voice is skillfully interwoven with the winds and strings of the orchestra, as the soloist and the orchestra trade melodies back and forth. Surprisingly, near the beginning of the last movement, double-stops in the viola sound almost as full as the orchestra.

In fact, Walton re-orchestrated the Viola Concerto in 1962, paring down the wind instruments, among other changes. He authorized both versions for performance. In 2002, violist Christopher Wellington edited both versions for Oxford University Press's complete edition of Walton's works. This edition also includes the edits of Frederick Riddle, the violist who first recorded the piece on the suggestion of Lionel Tertis. Riddle worked out various phrasings and bowings that were incorporated into the solo part with Walton's approval. The performance on this recording is the world premiere recording of the 1929 orchestration in the new edition by Wellington.

The three-movement work begins with a short, somber introduction by the orchestra. The viola then begins its journey with a graceful and unhurried melody, wavering between major and minor and casting a dreamy mood over the entire piece. A tightly structured framework holds modernist, Romantic, and chromatic harmonies together with its formal clarity.

Ralph Vaughan Williams, who learned to play violin and viola as a boy, dedicated his **Suite for Viola and Orchestra** to Lionel Tertis, who gave the first performance of the work in 1934. The viola spins glorious melodies throughout the eight-movement work; many of the melodies seem to spring from English folk songs, which provided Vaughan Williams with lasting inspiration throughout his career.

Like most of Vaughan Williams's music, the suite is delightful to listen to. It also takes a true virtuoso to perform the solo part, which may seem relatively undemanding to the listener (compared to the Walton concerto, for instance). However, the suite requires not only beautiful tone from the soloist, but also adroit handling of the instrument and impeccable technique.

The suite is a collection of eight short movements. The lyrical Prelude is followed by the Carol, and then by the contrasting Christmas Dance. The longest movement is the Ballad, which is the central movement of the suite, occurring at its midpoint. The principal theme of this movement is pentatonic, characteristic of many English folk songs. The orchestra enhances this melody with an opulent harmonic accompaniment, and a fast middle section in 6/8 provides contrast to the slower outer sections of the movement. Throughout the suite, dance-like movements offer contrast to slower lyrical sections, and the Ballad is followed by a fast movement in perpetual motion, testing the soloist's skill and stamina. The Polka Melan-

colique begins as a polka might, but the viola soon introduces a minor tonality. Before the viola strays away completely, the polka rhythm returns, but not for long. The solo viola then takes off in a rhapsodic flight, but returns to its melancholy theme, with the orchestra continuing to hint at the polka rhythm. The last movement is a galop, a quick dance that ends the piece on an optimistic note.

—David Brin

Hong-Mei Xiao, viola

Hong-Mei Xiao has been the first-prize winner of the Geneva International Music Competition. Her extraordinary artistry and brilliant virtuoso technique have gained accolades from reviewers across the globe. A recipient of the coveted Patek Philippe Grand Prize, Ms. Xiao has established herself as an international performing artist in recitals and as soloist with orchestra. She has toured throughout Europe, North and South America, and the Far East, performing in major concert halls and with orchestras of the greatest distinction. Her performances and recordings have been broadcast worldwide on radio and television.

Ms. Xiao began her violin studies with her father, Heng Xiao, a well-known composer. She graduated with highest honors from Shanghai Conservatory, where she studied viola with Xi-di Shen. As a recipient of the Asian Cultural Council Award, she completed her master's



degree with violist John Graham at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Hong-Mei Xiao was honored as a United States Artistic Ambassador. Her CD of Ernest Bloch's Works for Viola and Orchestra on the Naxos label won the Critic's Choice Award from *American Record Guide*, which praised her performance with "the solo playing is spectacular on all counts." She is also the featured soloist in the Naxos world premiere recording of the original and revised versions of Béla Bartók's Viola Concerto, which has received international critical acclaim since its release.

On this recording, Ms. Xiao plays an English viola made in London by Jacob Ford in 1790.

For more information, please visit
www.hongmeixiao.com

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV

The Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV was founded in 1945 by the Hungarian State Railways. Since then, it has developed a wide-ranging repertoire from music of the Baroque era to works by contemporary composers, and is currently ranked among the best professional ensembles in Hungary. Throughout its history, the orchestra has established close connections with internationally renowned artists and has performed in every European country as well as in Cyprus, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Columbia,



Ecuador, Peru, and Oman. Performances have taken place at many of the most important and respected concert halls, such as the Musikvereinsaal in Vienna, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Suntory Hall in Tokyo, and the Shanghai Oriental Art Center. The MÁV Symphony Orchestra was the only Hungarian orchestra to participate in Tokyo's legendary Three Tenors Production in 1999. The orchestra's recordings are available worldwide, issued by the most prominent labels. Since 2012, Peter Csaba has been the orchestra's artistic director and chief conductor, and Kobayashi Ken-Ichiro has been the honorary guest conductor since 2014.

János Kovács, conductor

János Kovács studied conducting at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest under András Kórodi. Immediately after his graduation in 1973, he joined the Hungarian State Opera House and



is currently the Principal Conductor. During the summers of 1979–81 he was musical assistant to Pierre Boulez in Bayreuth for performances of *The Ring* cycle and also for productions of *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Parsifal*. János Kovács has received several prestigious awards, including the Hungarian government's Liszt Prize. In addition to being regularly invited to conduct the leading Hungarian symphony orchestras in demanding repertoire, he has been

invited to conduct major orchestras throughout Europe and as far afield as Japan, Mexico, and Colombia. János Kovács has been the principal guest conductor of the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra and the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. His operatic repertoire ranges from Mozart to Verdi, Wagner and Richard Strauss to Alban Berg. He has also made numerous recordings, collaborating with many outstanding international artists.

Dedication

To my loving mother, Gui-Fang Sui, and the cherished memory of my father, Heng Xiao
—Hong-Mei Xiao

Engineering/Production Credits

Recording venue: Recorded at Studio 22, Hungarian Radio, Budapest

Dates recorded: June 20, 22–25, 2014

Producer: Peter Aczel

Editing: Wiley Ross

Mastering: Matthew Snyder

Engineer: Zoltan Pecze

Booklet production and editing: David Brin, Anne Maley and Lindsay Koob

Art design/layout: Lonnie Kunkel

© 2017 Delos Productions, Inc., P.O. Box 343, Sonoma, CA 95476-9998

(707) 996-3844 • (800) 364-0645

contactus@delosmusic.com • www.delosmusic.com

Made in USA

ENGLISH WORKS FOR VIOLA AND ORCHESTRA

SIR ARNOLD BAX (1883–1953)

1. **PHANTASY FOR VIOLA AND ORCHESTRA** (1920) (20:09)

SIR WILLIAM WALTON (1902–1983)

CONCERTO FOR VIOLA AND ORCHESTRA (1929 version) (26:37)

2. Andante comodo (8:33)

3. Vivo, con moto preciso (4:43)

4. Allegro moderato (13:21)

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872–1958)

SUITE FOR VIOLA AND ORCHESTRA (1933–34) (26:06)

5. Prelude (3:10)

6. Carol (2:49)

7. Christmas Dance (1:56)

8. Ballad (5:33)

9. Moto Perpetuo (3:31)

10. Musette (3:35)

11. Polka Melancolique (3:21)

12. Galop (2:11)

Total Time: 73:10

Hong-Mei Xiao, viola

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV

János Kovács, conductor

DE 3486