



Maurice
JACOBSON

**Theme and
Variations**

The Music Room

Mosaic

The Song of Songs

Julian Jacobson, Piano

**Jennifer Johnston,
Mezzo-soprano**

Raphael Wallfisch, Cello

Mariko Brown, Piano



Maurice
JACOBSON
(1896-1976)

1	Mosaic (1949)	6:43				
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3	I. Rustic Ballet	1:00	18	Carousal (1946)	5:55	
4	II. Sarabande	2:24	19	Humoreske (1948)	4:07	
5	III. Bagatelle	1:14		Theme and Variations (1943-1947)	19:59	
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11	Variation 2: Allegretto – poco capriccioso	1:01	26	Variation 6: L'istesso tempo – energico e ritmico	0:53	
12	Variation 3: Moderato – con energia	1:13	27	Variation 7: Allegretto scherzando	1:14	
13	Variation 4: Andante con espressione	1:41	28	Variation 8: Andante semplice	1:08	
14	Variation 5: Moderato – con deliberazione	1:42	29	Variation 9: Lento espressivo	1:52	
15	Variation 6: Finale: Andante con grandezza – Moderato – Moderato con moto – Tempo di tema	4:45	30	Variation 10: Allegro strepitoso	1:07	
			31	Variation 11: Allegretto con moto – alla Reel	1:19	
			32	Finale: Largo – molto pesante e misurato	4:02	

Maurice Jacobson (1896-1976)

Theme and Variations

Maurice Jacobson, my father, was regarded in his lifetime as a "musician extraordinary", gifted with exceptional versatility on many fronts. A child prodigy, by the age of sixteen he could play the whole of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* and all 32 Beethoven *Piano Sonatas* from memory. Studies at the Modern School of Music and the Royal College of Music were interrupted by World War 1 but resumed afterwards, concentrating on composition under Stanford and Holst. Already as a student he was noted as an exceptional accompanist, working with the great tenor John Coates. Later he was to discover Kathleen Ferrier, whom he encouraged to become a professional singer. After World War 2 he was instrumental, with Dame Ruth Railton, in setting up the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. From 1923 he was, first reader and editor, then a director, and finally chairman (1950 to 1972) of the musical publishing firm of J. Curwen & Sons. He was an indefatigable adjudicator at competitive music festivals, not only throughout Britain but in Canada and Hong Kong. For his services to music he was awarded the OBE in 1971. These manifold activities left him less time than he would have liked for composition: nevertheless he left an impressive total of some 450 works.

Fundamentally Jacobson was a classicist, steeped in the great Austro-German and French repertoires and – despite his professed love for Berg and Bartók – unable or unwilling to give up his classical habits of clear phrase structure and major-minor tonality, sometimes with modal inflections or chromatic exoticisms characteristic of Jewish music. A Londoner through and through, albeit from a family that had only recently arrived from Eastern Europe, he hardly belongs to the English pastoral tradition. Yet there is a sort of liberality and kindness about his music that may be thought of as an English characteristic. His enormous facility and professionalism ensured that he could write gratefully for amateurs and children, and the catalogue of his works shows many impeccably written arrangements for amateur choirs, pianists and others that served a useful purpose in their

day. But his more important original compositions, though not numerous, show that he managed to forge a personal idiom from his many and varied influences – music of complete technical assurance and a warm, open and engaging communicativeness.

The works on this recording were all written between 1935 and 1949, a period when (despite the war intervening) Jacobson still had time for composition before the increasing demands of public life made it more and more difficult. Most of the pieces are just post-war: *Mosaic*, a lively, quirky, characterful piece, is the latest composition to be presented here. Expertly laid out for the tricky piano duet medium, it shows the composer's harmony developing in a new, more adventurous direction. The textures are much lighter and thinner than in Jacobson's pre-war music, and at certain points rather jagged, like the roughly edged stones or glass which give buoyancy to a mosaic. *Salcey Lawn*, by comparison, represents an idyllic retreat into dearly remembered musical landscapes of the past. The work is named after a Grade 2 listed country house in Northamptonshire where Jacobson had been able to get away from time to time during the war. In gratitude to his hosts he wrote a beautiful, tranquil piece for cello and piano, entirely conservative in its musical language, conveying nevertheless the warmth of real conviction.

Written with an eye to the amateur market, *The Music Room*, the earliest work on this recording, contains some of Jacobson's most attractive writing for piano, fresh, vivid and full of contrast. His conservatism is here given new life through many felicitous and personal touches of harmony and texture. The suite enjoyed considerable popularity in its day, and the *Sarabande* is perhaps the composer's loveliest melody.

The two biblical songs show an important side of Jacobson's musical personality, though he never regarded himself as a Jewish composer *per se*. *The Lord is my shepherd* (Psalm 23) is described as "set to Tonus Peregrinus" – a medieval psalm-tone which gives

Jacobson's music an austere, timeless quality. This setting is extracted from the Markova-Dolin ballet *David* (1936). Jacobson's setting of *The Song of Songs*, the famous words from the Book of Solomon, was derived from his incidental music for *Men of God*, six radio plays devoted to Hebrew prophets. Kathleen Ferrier was one of its early interpreters.

Jacobson's more classical side is shown in the *Romantic Theme* (1910) and *Variations* (1944). The theme shows the powerful influences on the fourteen-year old piano-mad boy of Beethoven and Chopin, and the five formally strict *Variations* and freely extended *Finale* range wider while not fundamentally departing from the harmonic language of the theme. The fifth is the most original and forward-looking, and, although the *Finale* is perhaps less convincing in its quasi-Elgarian grandeur and echoes of Beethoven, it still makes an impressive, full-blooded ending.

The inscription at the top of the score of the *Lament* for cello and piano reads "To the memory of Harry Plunket Greene", the noted Irish baritone and teacher who had accompanied Jacobson on an adjudicating tour of Canada in 1931. It is one of the composer's most serious, concentrated and deeply felt pieces in any form, gaining particular strength from its unusual and intense harmonic language.

Jacobson had been a pianist of considerable virtuosity in his younger days, and the piano piece *Carousal* is an essay in brilliant figurations and forceful articulation, perhaps depicting a fairground scene. A central section, marked *Alla Musette* calms the proceedings; the rowdy atmosphere returns before the piece ends quietly and mischievously. The *Humoreske* for cello and piano, too, displays the vivacity and keen sense of humour which are remembered by all who knew him. This swift and capricious piece contains some novel and elliptical harmonic progressions which, like *Mosaic*, show the route Jacobson's music might have taken if he had been able to devote more time to composition after the war.

Finally the *Theme and Variations* is the one extended work presented here and shows Jacobson's assured handling of a large-scale structure. Composed for a large

orchestra, it received many performances, and the composer himself made the piano duet version which was discovered only after his death. The modal theme is stated in unison until its end, giving it an austere, plainchant character. *Variation 1* continues the modal flavour but now as a playful dance with a hint of Vaughan Williams (a personal friend). *Variation 2* is still faster and the music flits by, largely in 'pianissimo'. In *Variation 3* the music becomes more serious – it is in fact a fully worked out fugue which develops considerable power and momentum. *Variation 4* returns to the *Lento espressivo* marking of the *Theme*, now decorated and harmonised with rich solemnity. *Variation 5* is a complete contrast, much faster, passages of darting, dancing lightness alternating with thundering 'marcato' repeated chords. The 'marcato' texture continues without a break into *Variation 6*, though with a quieter middle section. *Variation 7* has a sort of morse-code continuous tapping texture of high repeated notes against short, expressive phrases. The tonality shifts up a semitone for *Variation 8*, a beautiful cantilena over long pedal notes. This leads to *Variation 9*, the emotional heart of the work, with a plaintive, desolate melody in D minor, turning at the end to a consoling D major, at which point the music pauses. Returning to E major, *Variation 10* blows this all away in a fine bluster of activity. *Variation 11* is a Scotch reel, a comic relief, but towards the end the atmosphere becomes more serious as Jacobson ushers in his *Finale*. Some highly dramatic writing, including a cadenza-like passage, leads to a grand, triumphant peroration with jubilant peals of bells, rounding off this rich and wide-ranging set of variations.

In preparing this recording, I had the benefit of studying some of my father's manuscripts and personal copies. An eminently practical musician, he left many pencil markings on the scores, such as (for instance) a complete set of suggested metronome marks for the *Romantic Theme and Variations*, as well as various suggestions for dynamics and expression. I have tried to use these to get closer to his intentions.

Julian Jacobson

8 The Lord is my shepherd *Psalm 23*

Adonai ro-i, lo ehsar.
Bin'ot deshe yarbitseini,
Al mei m'nuhot y'nahaleini,
Naf'shi y'shovev,
Yan'heini b'ma'aglei tsedek,
L'ma'an sh'mo.
Gam ki eilech
B'gei tsalmavet,
Lo ira ra,
Ki Atah imadi.
Shiv't'cha umishan'techa
Hemah y'nahamuni.
Ta'aroch l'fanai shuCHAN
Neced tsor'rai
Dishanta vashemen roshi
Cosi r'vayah.
Ach tov vahesed
Yird'funi kol y'mei hayai
V'shav'ti b'veit Adonai
L'orech yamim.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
He leadeth me beside the still waters,
He restoreth my soul,
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness,
For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk
Through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
For Thou art with me.
Thy rod and Thy staff
They comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
In the presence of mine enemies,
Thou anointest my head with oil,
My cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy
Shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

16 The Song of Songs

Text from *The Song of Solomon*

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.

The voice of my beloved! Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land:

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven.

His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.

His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely.
This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death;
jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.

Julian Jacobson



Photo: Roger Harris

Julian Jacobson studied piano and composition from the age of seven with Lamar Crowson and Arthur Benjamin, subsequently studying at the Royal College of Music, Queen's College, Oxford and privately with Louis Kentner. He enjoys an international career as soloist, chamber musician with many prominent artists, and teacher, appearing in over forty countries and making annual visits in recent years to Australia and the Far East. He has been soloist with several of the principal British orchestras under conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle, Jane Glover and Tamás Vásáry, as well as appearing in most of the leading British festivals. He has been particularly acclaimed for his performances of the Beethoven *Sonatas*, of which he has given eight complete cycles, most recently at The Forge, Camden Town (2011-12). In 2003 he performed the entire cycle in a single day in aid of the charity WaterAid, an event which attracted worldwide media coverage and which he repeated in October 2013 in St Martin-in-the-Fields.

Jennifer Johnston



Photo: Richard Ecclestone

The young dramatic mezzo-soprano Jennifer Johnston was named by both *BBC Music Magazine* and the *Observer* as a rising star, and the *Financial Times* as the 'Face to Watch in Opera'. A former BBC New Generation Artist, she is a graduate of Cambridge University and the Royal College of Music, and is the recipient of numerous awards including Second Prize at the Montserrat Caballé International Singing Competition, two Susan Chilcott Scholarships and a Wingate Scholarship. She has appeared in opera at the Salzburg Festival, Bayerische Staatsoper, Festival d'Aix en Provence, Opéra de Lille, the Baltic Sea Festival, the Aldeburgh Festival, Scottish Opera and Opera North. A member of the Prince Consort and a noted recitalist, she made her solo recital début at the Wigmore Hall with Joseph Middleton, broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. She has appeared at the Cheltenham, City of London, Brighton, Perth and Aldeburgh Festivals and at the Sage in Gateshead, and broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3.

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.

Mariko Brown



Photo: Roger Harris

Anglo-Japanese Mariko Brown began her piano studies with Martyn Dyke, with whom she performed regularly including many outreach community projects. She made her first concerto appearance age nine under Dr Ruth Gipps, subsequently going on to study with Joan Havill at the Guildhall School Junior Department, where she won the prestigious Lutine Prize. This led to concerto appearances at the Barbican Hall and St Giles Cripplegate as part of the City of London Festival. During this time she also took up composition with Gary Carpenter, receiving a prize for her *Oboe Sonata*. She was awarded the Principal's prize on graduation from the Junior department and went on to continue her studies in the Senior Department with Joan Havill and Gary Carpenter, and also Simon Bainbridge, graduating in 2000. Her *Piano Sonata*, commissioned and performed by Helen Reid, in 2004, was given its première at Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. A dedicated teacher, Mariko Brown taught for many years at Junior Guildhall and currently teaches at the Yehudi Menuhin School.



The **British Music Society**, founded in 1979, brings together professional and amateur musicians, students and scholars, and music enthusiasts young and old from around the globe to promote, preserve and celebrate British music, pre-dominantly from the Twentieth century, both at home and abroad. Its extensive discography is now being re-issued by Naxos, bringing to a wider audience many highly-acclaimed performances, often world premières, of neglected British works. The Society's Historic label includes a number of famous vintage recordings by artists such as Noel Mewton-Wood and Walter Goehr.

In addition the Society produces a Journal, *British Music*, packed full of scholarly articles and reviews, as well as a regular e-newsletter for members. Our website lists forthcoming BMS events as well as performances of British music, and also provides a forum for discussion and debate.

www.britishmusicsociety.com

Maurice Jacobson was regarded in his lifetime as a “musician extraordinary” such was his versatility as a composer, performer and music administrator. His works are fundamentally classicist, varying from the timeless austerity of *The Lord is my shepherd*, the popular accessibility of *The Music Room* and the virtuoso *Carousal*, to the concentrated and deeply felt *Lament*. The *Theme and Variations* is a rich and wide-ranging work originally written for large orchestra. These interpretations with the composer’s pianist son Julian Jacobson reap the benefits of access to original manuscripts and an unparalleled intimacy with the composer’s intentions.



Maurice
JACOBSON
(1896-1976)

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		20-32 Theme and Variations (1943-1947)	19:59

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Julian Jacobson, Piano **1-32** [*primo* **20-32**; *secondo* **1**]

Jennifer Johnston, Mezzo-soprano **8 16** • **Raphael Wallfisch, Cello** **2 17 19**

Mariko Brown, Piano [*primo* **1**; *secondo* **20-32**]

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A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet. The sung texts are also included,
and can be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/571351.htm

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