

Thomas PITFIELD

Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2

Anthony Goldstone, Piano • Peter Donohoe, Piano
Royal Northern College of Music Orchestra
Andrew Penny



Thomas Pitfield (1903-1999)

Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2 • Studies on an English Dance-Tune, etc. Xylophone Sonata

Thomas Pitfield was born in Bolton in 1903 and died in Bowdon, Cheshire, in 1999. His father was a joiner and builder, and his mother a dressmaker. Although from infancy he had first artistic and then musical leanings, these were denigrated by his conformist family, and at the age of fourteen he was pitchforked protestingly into a seven-year apprenticeship in engineering. His savings during this period did, however, afford him a year's study of piano, cello and harmony at the Royal Manchester College of Music. After attempting a freelance career as a musician, commercial pressures dictated a change of direction and he won a scholarship to study art and cabinet-making at the Bolton School of Art. During his years as an arts and crafts teacher in the Midlands he became increasingly known as a composer, owing to the help and encouragement of Hubert Foss of the Oxford University Press, who published many of his compositions and commissioned for the press cover-designs (including that for Britten's *Simple Symphony*), cards, folk-song translations and book illustrations. In 1947 Pitfield was invited to teach composition at his old College, and remained on its staff (through the transition to the Royal Northern College of Music) until his seventieth birthday in 1973. In a long and happy retirement he continued to pursue both his musical and artistic interests until well into his nineties.

As a composer Pitfield was essentially self-taught. Most of the works in his substantial output are collections of miniatures, many written for children or amateurs, for whom he seemed to compose with an innate understanding of their capabilities. Larger works include a five-movement *Sinfonietta* written at the request of Sir John Barbiroli for the Hallé Orchestra, and concertos for piano, violin, recorder and percussion, and there is a quantity of chamber music written for many distinguished artists of his own and

subsequent generations, including Goossens, Evelyn Rothwell, Archie Camden, Dolmetsch, and Osian Ellis. A speciality was composing for unusual instruments, including solo works for accordion, clarsach, xylophone and harmonica, and he even invented his own instrument, the "patterphone", to produce rain-like sounds.

Despite being a somewhat idiosyncratic performer on the piano, Thomas Pitfield was strongly attracted to the instrument throughout his life, one of his earliest publications being *Prelude Minuet and Reel*, still his best known work. The idea of a piano concerto was first mooted by the Australian pianist Beatrice Tange, who had recorded *Prelude Minuet and Reel* for HMV Sydney, but when the resulting work, with string orchestra accompaniment, was sent to her, she returned it unplayed as not being "in her line" – though perhaps the fact that it was dedicated to the Liverpool pianist Gordon Green may not have helped. This early *Concerto* was eventually performed by another Liverpool pianist, Douglas Miller, but Pitfield subsequently withdrew it, and used the material in other works.

His next essay in the form, *Concerto No. 1, in E minor*, with full orchestra, was written in 1946-47 at the request of yet another Liverpool pianist, Stephen Wearing, who gave the first performance with the (Royal Liverpool) Philharmonic Orchestra under Hugo Rignold on 12th November 1949, winning critical praise from *The Liverpool Daily Post*. Subsequent performances followed under Louis Cohen, Boult (for the Festival of Britain), John Hopkins and Vilem Tausky, but then, despite having had three broadcasts, it fell foul of the BBC's reading panel, to the composer's composer's chagrin. The offensive report was read to Pitfield at his insistence, and "the words registered as if burnt through my skin", as he wrote in

his autobiography – “Moody and Sankey – sentimental – academic – derivative-Liszt – produces a mouse.....” The work was, however, revived for Pitfield’s retirement concert at the RNCM in 1973, when it was played by Anthony Goldstone. The concerto, which is in three movements, bears many of Pitfield’s fingerprints, parallel triads, folkish melody, cheeky grace notes, lush hymn-like harmonisations, and black/white note cascades between alternating hands, as well as hints of Gershwin, Poulenc and Ravel. The composer’s own programme note for the work reads as follows:

“The interval of a fourth, with which the present work begins, is used as a kind of motto throughout. It sometimes undergoes a gradual chromatic expansion, as in the rocking bass which becomes conspicuous quite early in the exposition.

“The first subject provides, through many transformations, most of the contrapuntal fabric of the work, and the slow theme beginning the second movement, much of the harmonic. After a statement of theme 1 in the basses (with a little help from the cellos and bass-drum), it is restated in canon between piano and woodwind – except that the latter have it in reverse. Subsequently there are many transformations: expansions, compressions, ostinatos, canons in two keys, and finally, in the extended coda, fugal treatments.

“While one of the first movement’s three subjects is in contrast to the remaining two – and chiefly confined to the piano – echoes of the other two (and particularly the interval of the fourth) still persist. The third and more cantabile theme turns up again fragmentarily in the next movement.

“A solemn dirge-like theme (lower strings used antiphonally with the piano) initiates the second movement, which owes most of its existence to this theme. If the concerto were a play, the theme would probably be rightly regarded as the leading character. It is not, however, unconnected with plays, for it was written for an amateur production of *Hamlet* during my youth, when it provided the incidental music to the

Death scene. Regarded graphically rather than purely musically, it can be traced (by outline) in the slightly mysterious scherzo which comprises a section of this movement.

“Movement 3 is gay and impudent – a Rondo with a fugal appendage. The gay mood and that of the fugue have a brief struggle for ascendancy, the latter prevailing. (The subject is again the first of movement 1). Soon the main theme from movement 2 gradually emerges (in solemn chords on the brass) like a threatening shape, at first faintly visible through the more transparent and complex texture of the fugue itself. Finally the dirge-like theme succeeds in flooding the fugue and emerges blazoning its triumph unchallenged, except that it accommodates the rhythm of the fugue subject (pounded on the bass drum and cymbal) to its own purpose. The elation of triumph subsides and some brief reference to other moods of the work (including a canonic compression of the Rondo theme) brings the work to an end.”

Piano Concerto No. 2 had an even more chequered history than the first. It was commissioned by Pitfield’s friend the publisher Max Hinrichsen at the instigation of Peters Edition in the United States, and bears a publication date of 1960. Piano students in American universities had to play a concerto movement lasting ten minutes for their performance auditions, and the intention was to provide a miniature concerto within that timespan, thus allowing for the variations in speed and mood that a single extracted movement would not provide. At the suggestion of the publisher, but against the composer’s better judgement, the work was published with the subtitle “*The Student*”. Not surprisingly, this was seen as patronising, and the work fell between two stools, being shunned by both professional and students alike, despite a play-through by a student with the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra. The composer’s collection of programmes does not include any reference to a formal première of the work.

The concerto is prefaced by a quotation from Milton: “..... and bring with thee Jest and youthful

Jollity". The opening movement, *Dance-Prologue*, starts with a typical Pitfield ostinato of ascending thirds, which recurs regularly throughout the movement, and melds together three very simple white-note tunes, a descending scale, a touchingly harmonized hymn-like melody, and a waltz tune starting with a repeated note motif. A touch of variety is provided in the middle section by some quasi-flamenco harmonies and rhythms in the orchestra. The second movement, *Interlude on White Keys*, serves as a scherzo, and derives its contrast from the opening movement (itself nearly all on the white keys) by being modally inflected. The main material for the movement is an insistent running figure introduced by the piano at the start, and the contrasting middle section is a tender and free folk-like melody (also modal) played by the piano alone. In the reprise the running figure is counterpointed against a reel-like tune on the clarinet, with the side drum providing rhythmic impetus, before the rest of the players break in with desultory interjections, the strings and woodwind rocking the movement to a hushed conclusion.

The last movement, a set of three variations on the English folksong "*The Oak and the Ash*", acts as both slow movement and finale. After the solemn and expressive statement of the theme, the first variation is playful and spiky, in Pitfield's favourite 5/8 rhythm,

whereas the second, for piano alone, is a dreamy meditation. The third and final toccata-like variation brings back high jinks, with wayward escapades into remote keys before a resounding sequence of triads on the orchestra, accompanying a cascade of double-octaves from the soloist, bring the work to an exultant and sudden conclusion in the home key of C Major.

Studies on an English Dance-Tune was written for Pitfield's pupil, the composer and pianist John McCabe, who first performed it, whilst still a student, at the Royal Manchester College in February 1961. The tune in question is "*Jenny Pluck Pears*", and each of the seven short movements subjects a fragment of the tune to rhythmical, modal, or playing technique transformation. *Arietta and Finale* is an early work, published in 1932, whilst the ebullient *Toccata*, written for the Manchester pianist Lucy Pierce (a fellow teacher at the RMCM) was published in 1953.

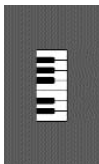
The four movement *Xylophone Sonata*, published in 1987, was composed for the Hallé Orchestra's principal percussionist Eric Woolliscroft. It bears the distinction of being the first work for the instrument to use a pair of fixed beaters in each hand, and has firmly entered the instrument's still young repertoire.

John Turner



**Thomas Pitfield: Self-portrait
(Reproduced by courtesy of
the Pitfield Trust)**

British Piano Concerto Foundation



Britain shares with the United States an extraordinary willingness to welcome and embrace the traditions of foreign cultures. Our countries comprise the world's two greatest 'melting pots', and, as a result, the artistic appreciation of our people has been possibly the most catholic and least nepotistic in the world. This tradition is one that we may be extremely proud of. In the case of music, it is certainly one of the reasons for my own initial inspiration to become a musician and to embrace as many different styles and periods as reasonably possible in one lifetime.

Perhaps as a result of this very enviable virtue, however, we do have a tendency to underrate the artistic traditions of our own wonderful culture. As far as music is concerned there are of course many exceptions; one thinks immediately of the operas of Benjamin Britten, the symphonic and choral works of Elgar and Vaughan Williams, as well as the leading rôle Britain has played in new music since the 1960s. Of these achievements we are rightly proud. The British piano concerto and solo piano music however, of which there is a vast array, has been largely ignored, particularly over the last thirty years.

The role and aim of the British Piano Concerto Foundation is to try to expand and explore this hugely rich and varied repertoire. It is not to exploit a musical 'curiosity corner'. It is not merely to fill a gap in the 'market place' by promoting public performances and recordings of less important music. It is to make the international musical community more aware of the true greatness of much of this repertoire.

The commitment of Naxos to this artistic cause is a source of huge inspiration to those of us involved in the BPCF, and a reason to be optimistic about the future of recorded music at a time when there is so much pessimism.

I am sure that those administrators, listeners and performers who shape the world of music will agree that some of this music is amongst the most original and fascinating, not only of the twentieth century, but also of previous ones.

It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I am associated with this project, and I look forward to continuing for whatever time I have left to explore the wonderful music of my own country.

Peter Donohoe

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Peter Donohoe

Peter Donohoe was born in Manchester in 1953 and studied at the Royal Northern College of Music with Derek Wyndham, and then in Paris with Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod. Since his unprecedented success at the 1982 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, he has developed a distinguished career in Europe, the United States, the Far East and Australasia. His orchestral appearances have included collaboration with all the major London orchestras, with Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, Vienna Symphony and Czech Philharmonic Orchestras. He has performed regularly at the BBC Promenade Concerts in London and at the Edinburgh Festival as well as many other major festivals in Europe. Peter Donohoe has made a number of recordings, winning critical praise and awards that have included the Grand Prix International du Disque Liszt and the Gramophone Concerto Award. His best-selling recording of Elgar's *Piano Quintet* (8.553737) is one of his significant earlier collaborations with Naxos. Peter Donohoe feels a strong affinity to the music of his own country and is very proud to be involved in this British Piano Concertos project.





Anthony Goldstone

Anthony Goldstone is one of Britain's most respected pianists. He studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music (which later honoured him with a Fellowship) where his piano professor was Derrick Wyndham, and later in London with Maria Curcio, one of Schnabel's greatest pupils. His career has comprised concerts in six continents, prestigious festival invitations, over fifty recordings and very many broadcasts. Numerous London appearances include the Last Night of the Proms, after which Benjamin Britten wrote to thank him for his performance of his *Diversions*. In October 1973 he played Thomas Pitfield's *First Piano Concerto* in his retirement concert, with the orchestra of the newly formed Royal Northern College of Music in which Peter Donohoe was the timpanist.

RNCM Symphony Orchestra

The RNCM Symphony Orchestra is one of several major ensembles at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. All the ensembles perform regularly in public concerts in the College as well as externally around Britain and abroad. The Symphony Orchestra has worked with many guest conductors including Martyn Brabbins, Sir Edward Downes, Mark Elder, Cristian Mandeal, Vassily Sinaisky, Gerard Schwarz and Yan Pascal Tortelier. The orchestra also supports the College's critically acclaimed opera productions, most recently Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* and Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*. Overseas tours have included concerts at the Al Bustan Festival in Beirut and a residency at the annual Cantiere Internazionale d'arte di Montepulciano, Italy between 1992 and 2003. The RNCM Symphony Orchestra's commercial recordings include contributions to Classic's *The British Symphonic Collection Series*.

Andrew Penny

Andrew Penny was born in Hull and entered the Royal Manchester College of Music in 1971 to study the clarinet with Sidney Fell. As a postgraduate he was the first holder of the Rothschild Scholarship in Conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music, studying with Sir Charles Groves and Timothy Reynish, subsequently receiving the Ricordi Prize. He gained invaluable experience with the Opera Unit during this time and was associated with many of the operas presented by the College in its early years both in Manchester and Sadlers Wells Theatre. He also studied with Sir Edward Downes on courses in Holland and on the BBC Conductors Seminar in 1985. Since 1992 he has made over thirty recordings for the Naxos and Marco Polo labels. Much of the repertoire is of British Music and includes symphonies by Sir Malcolm Arnold and Havergal Brian, film music by Vaughan Williams and Walton, theatre music by Sullivan and Holbrooke and light music by Coates and Arnold. His complete cycle of the nine symphonies by Arnold was produced in time for the composer's eightieth birthday in October 2001. In the Gramophone Awards of 1999 the Editor's Choice Award was made to 22 Naxos Discs as an outstanding contribution to Twentieth Century British Music. Three of those releases were conducted by Andrew Penny; the Arnold *Third* and *Fourth Symphonies* (8.553739) and two discs of Walton's music for the Olivier films of Shakespeare's *Henry V* (Naxos 8.553343), *Hamlet* and *As You Like It* (Naxos 8.553344). Andrew Penny has been Musical Director of the Hull Philharmonic Orchestra since 1982.

Publishers:

Bardic Edition (Tracks 1-9)

Pitfield Trust (Tracks 10-19)

Peters Edition (Tracks 20-23)

The British composer and teacher, Thomas Pitfield, who continued to pursue both his musical and artistic interests until well into his nineties, was largely self-taught in composition. Most of the works in his substantial output are collections of miniatures, many written for children or amateurs. His larger works include a *Sinfonietta* and concertos for piano, violin, recorder and percussion. The two *Piano Concertos* bear many of Pitfield's fingerprints, which include folkish melodies, lush hymn-like harmonisations, and black/white note cascades between alternating hands, as well as hints of Gershwin, Poulenc and Ravel.



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(1903-1999)



	Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor	23:28	12	Cantabile Melody	0:42
1	Allegro risoluto	6:53	13	Major-Minor	0:21
2	Grave	9:51	14	Phrygian	0:19
3	Allegro gaiamente	6:43	15	Three-Two-Three	0:54
			16	Octaves	0:41
	Piano Concerto No. 2	11:32		Arietta and Finale	4:51
4	Dance-Prologue	2:38	17	Arietta	1:39
5	Interlude on White Keys	2:38	18	Finale	3:12
6	Air and Variations (The Oak and The Ash)	1:08	19	Toccatà	3:54
7	Variation 1	1:19		Xylophone Sonata	6:22
8	Variation 2	1:09	20	Introduction	2:04
9	Variation 3	2:40	21	Intermezzo	0:59
	Studies on an English Dance-Tune	4:35	22	Reel	1:21
10	Bi-Tonal	0:39	23	Toccatà	1:57
11	Seven-Eight, Dorian	0:59			

Anthony Goldstone, Piano (1-3) • Peter Donohoe, Piano (4-19) and Xylophone (20-23)
Royal Northern College of Music Orchestra (1-9) • Andrew Penny (1-9)

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 Manchester, 6th-8th December 2003

Producer & Sound Engineer: Tim Handley • Booklet Notes: John Turner

Cover Image: *Macclesfield* (lino cut) by Thomas Pitfield

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 Playing Time
 54:41


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