# English Accents

## oboe players active in England during the 1950s

Oboe classics
CC2027

including Sidney Sutcliffe, Léon Goossens, Terence MacDonagh and Evelyn Rothwell

# English Accents

## oboe players active in England during the 1950s

1. **Michael Winfield (with Roger Winfield, cor anglais),**
   **Delius: Intermezzo from Fennimore and Gerda** 4:57
   Hallé Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli
   Pye CCL 30108, issued 1957

2. **Leonard Brain and Sidney Sutcliffe**
   **Mozart: Divertimento in Eb K 289 – Minuet** 2:36
   Dennis Brain Wind Ensemble: Leonard Brain & Sidney Sutcliffe (oboes); Dennis Brain & Neill Sanders (horns); John Alexandra & Paul Draper (bassoons)
   Originally issued on 78rpm HMS 80;
   LP issue: HMV HLP 19, recorded 5 Nov 1952

3. **Edward Selwyn**
   **Bach: Ich habe genug (from Cantata No. 82)** 7:56
   Gérard Souzay (baritone), Geraint Jones Orchestra, Geraint Jones
   HMV ALP 1670, reviewed March 1959

4. **Janet Craxton**
   **Handel: Concerto in no 3 in G minor (ed. Minchinton) – Grave (1st movement)** 3:35
   Collegium Musicum Londinii, John Minchinton
   Classics Club 507, c. 1959

5. **Léon Goossens**
   **Mozart: Concerto in C – Allegro Aperto (1st movement, cadenza: Goossens)** 8:08
   Sinfonia of London, Colin Davis
   WRC T 59, recorded 19/20 April 1960

6. **Evelyn Rothwell**
   **Corelli, arr. Barbirolli, Concerto; Preludio and Allemanda (1st & 2nd movements)** 4:14
   Hallé Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli
   Pye CCL 30127, first published 1958

7. **John Barnett**
   **Britten: Prince of the Pagodas – Dance of Belle Rose** 2:15
   Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Benjamin Britten
   Decca LXT5336, reviewed July 1957

8. **Joy Boughton**
   **Britten: Arethusa (last movement of Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op 49)** 2:50
   BBC broadcast, 3 October 1952

9. **Sidney Sutcliffe and Natalie James**
   **Mozart: Serenade in C minor, K 388 - Allegro (1st movement)** 6:58
   London Baroque Ensemble: Sidney Sutcliffe & Natalie James (oboes); Jack Brymer & Stephen Waters (clarinets); Cecil James & Edward Wilson (bassoons); Dennis Brain & Neill Sanders (horns); Karl Haas
   Pye CCL 30119, recorded 13 May 1957

10. **Terence MacDonagh**
    **J. C. Bach: Symphony in Bb, Op. 18 - Andante (2nd movement)** 4:26
    RPO, Charles Gerhardt
    RCA 440.653, First issued 1962

11. **Janet Craxton**
    **Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake – Scene & Dance of the Little Swans** 4:00
    Hallé Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli
    Originally issued on HMV DB 9549 in Jan 1951;
    LP issue: HMV BLP 1004



12. **Roger Lord**
    **Brahms: Violin Concerto – start of Adagio (2nd Movement)** 2:33
    Henryk Szerying (violin), LSO, Pierre Monteux
    RCA RB 16168, reviewed Nov 1959

13. **Roger Lord and Michael Dobson**
    **Handel: Arrival of the Queen of Sheba (Solomon)** 3:03
    LSO, George Weldon
    Columbia 33SX 1045, reviewed Dec 1953

14. **Peter Graeme**
    **Handel: Concerto Grosso Op. 3 No. 2 in B flat – Largo (2nd movement)** 3:20
    Boyd Neel Orchestra, with Thurston Dart (organ), Boyd Neel
    Decca LXT 5020, issued 1955

15. **Sidney Sutcliffe**
    **Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 – Andante (2nd movement)** 5:05
    Gareth Morris (flute), Hugh Bean (violin), Sidney Sutcliffe (oboe)
    Philharmonia Orchestra, Otto Klemperer
    Columbia SAX 2408, recorded Sept or Oct 1960

16. **Everybody**
    **Handel: Music for the Royal Fireworks – Bourrées** 1:46
    Pro Arte Orchestra, Charles Mackerras
    Pye CML 33005, recorded 13 April 1959

17. **Everybody**
    **Handel: Music for the Royal Fireworks – Minuets** 3:11
    Pro Arte Orchestra, Charles Mackerras
    Pye CML 33005, recorded 13 April 1959

Total time 71:02


### Credits and Acknowledgements:

Recordings supplied and transferred from the LP collection of Christopher Steward
Additional Material from Neil Black and Peter Walden
Programme notes by Geoffrey Burgess, Jeremy Polmear, Mark Baigent, Neil Black, Christopher Steward and Peter Walden
Mastering by Dave Rowell
Oboe image by Howarth of London
CD and booklet design by Steam

Thanks to all the above, and especial thanks to Neil Black for a steady helping hand on the tiller at all stages of the project. Thanks to the British Double Reed Society and its issues of The Double Reed News over the years, with editors Graham Salter and Clive Fairbairn, as a source of information and photographs. Finally, thanks for the special proof-reading abilities of Christopher Steward, as a result of which this may be the most error-free Oboe Classics CD booklet ever! (Any remaining errors are of course my own.)
Jeremy Polmear


### Booklet Contents:

photo Michele Corbman

# The Historical Context

*by Geoffrey Burgess*

Over the past half century a curious reversal has taken place. Whereas a wider range of regional accents in spoken English has become officially accepted, there has been a distinct shift in oboe playing tone and style away from diversity and towards homogeneity. In the 1950s there was a single, pervasive official English spoken accent: the inimitable Richard Dimbleby's commentaries of great national events, such as the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, became the voice of the British Empire. But while the Queen's English reigned supreme on the air waves, there was no definitive 'correct' British style of oboe playing: rather players cultivated their own distinctive accents, influenced by a variety of different traditions. Today, however, BBC announcers use a multitude of different accents, but it is striking to what degree the uniformity of tone and approach among English oboists defies regional or personal identification.

After the initial years of austerity at the end of the 1940s, employment returned to adequate levels and, with increased average wages and reduced working hours, the general standard of living in Britain rose. This meant not only more leisure time but money for average families to spend on cultural activities such as concerts. Leisure culture in the 50s moved from London society and private country parties to become a middle-class phenomenon. The post-war welfare state not only provided improved education for more of the population, but specialized training in the arts and music, and an expansion of opportunities for musicians. The Liverpool and Birmingham Orchestras had become permanent bodies for the first time during the war; others, like the Royal Philharmonic and Philharmonia, along with the Edinburgh Festival and the National Youth Orchestra were established hard on the heels of the declaration of peace. Record companies, eager to promote new technology like the LP, full frequency sound and stereophonic recording, added to the thriving musical economy. The immense popularity of the cinema played its part by providing employment to musicians needed to record a constant stream of sound tracks. But perhaps more than any other institution, the BBC democratized Classical music by broadcasting it to the entire population.

Once recovery from the devastation of the war was under way, people recognized the value in the lasting things of life: the beauty of nature, Classical art and music. Surprisingly, the huge upsurge in concert-going which attracted even factory workers did not result in a drop of standards or the proliferation of popular 'froth'. On the contrary, there was an increased demand for inspiring musical experiences of high quality that did not shirk contemporary social issues.

The post-war era also saw a narrowing of the divide between town and country. At the same time that more of the middle class had ready access to rural areas, it was becoming increasingly apparent that England's pristine areas were threatened by urban expansion. The British pastoral idyll – so often serenaded by the oboe – would likewise expire, Vaughan Williams' wartime 5th Symphony and his Oboe Concerto being two of its swansongs. Léon Goossens was one of many who took advantage of the viability of private automobile ownership and an efficient train system to retreat from the impersonality of city life to set up home in the country. He lived there with his family near East Chiltington up to 1958 when he moved back to London.

This was a time of renewed confidence in British composers. Benjamin Britten's music swept through post-war Britain like a blast of sea air. While ground breakers, Britten and Michael Tippett retained approachable tonal idioms without the alienating tendencies of the next wave of avantgardists. It is striking how many of the oboists had personal connections with composers. As well as Léon Goossens' brother the composer-conductor Eugène, there was Joy Boughton, the daughter of the composer Rutland Boughton who wrote a number of pieces for her. Roger Lord's wife Madeleine Dring and Janet Craxton's husband Alan Richardson both composed pieces for oboe in a light, melodic style.

But not all the 'new' music performed by oboists in the 1950s was contemporary in origin. Some of the works, like the Concerto on Themes by Corelli on this CD was one of several attempts to provide suitable concertos for the oboe. Dating from 1945, this was one of two such works that John Barbirolli arranged for his wife Evelyn Rothwell. (Arthur Benjamin's Concerto after Cimarosa was also written for her.) The oboe concertos of Haydn and Mozart had recently been (re)discovered, and both works were, again, closely associated with Rothwell. She had played the modern première of the Mozart C major Oboe Concerto (known up to that time only in the version for flute) with the Hallé Orchestra while on tour in Salzburg in 1948. Although made much later, Goossens' version of the Concerto was widely disseminated and is typical of the recordings he made at this time which were dedicated more to 18th-century music than to modern commissions.

Most of the prominent oboists active in the 50s had already been trained before the war, and got their start in the 1930s. The music scene in England was vastly different before and after the war. Describing her early career as a freelancer in the 30s, Rothwell wrote of how "a young, or comparatively untried player

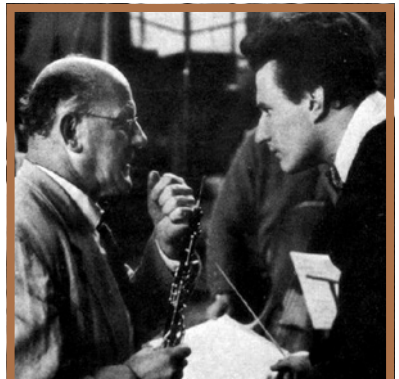
who could handle their instrument well, was known to be reliable and to get on with their colleagues, was assured of plenty of deputizing work of varying kinds." Those like Rothwell who had cut their teeth in the pre-war freelancing world were well equipped to step into the chairs of established orchestras. The men of conscriptable age did what they could to keep their playing going during the war. Terence MacDonagh served in the Auxiliary Fire Service; Leonard Brain played in the RAF Symphony Orchestra from 1940 to 1946, while Sidney Sutcliffe was stationed in Winchester and among other things played saxophone in a Dixieland Band.

Goossens retained his status as undisputed King of British oboists. Already established with a major career as orchestral player, chamber musician and soloist (see Oboe Classics CDs 'Rare Goossens' and 'The Oboe 1903-1953'), after the war he took the challenge of dedicating himself to work as a soloist. By this time a veteran in the music scene, he quipped that "perhaps because I'm an older person, conductors and other soloists defer to me." The recordings from this era certainly speak to his authoritative manner. With resistance between 'ivory tower' academics and 'carthorse' players persisting, new ideas were not always met with enthusiasm by more experienced players. This applied to new techniques as well as the interpretation of Baroque music. Goossens, more old-fashioned than others, famously refused to ornament Handel, taking pride in playing his music exactly as he had written it.

Sidney Sutcliffe studied with Goossens at the Royal College of Music, and after the war entered the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Only on the second invitation from Walter Legge did he accept the position as first oboe with the Philharmonia. But being one of the 'Royal Flush' (the élite wind players of the Philharmonia) proved taxing, and in the 60s Sutcliffe opted to move to the less strenuous position that Janet Craxton vacated in the BBC Symphony Orchestra. His unique training on a high-pitch Louis oboe that he needed to lip down to A=440 gave him exceptional facility and wonderful pp control.

Perhaps because his own heritage was Belgian, early on in his career Goossens took inspiration from another Belgian oboist, Henri de Busscher. And there were others who bring

Léon Goossens and Colin Davis discussing the Mozart Concerto

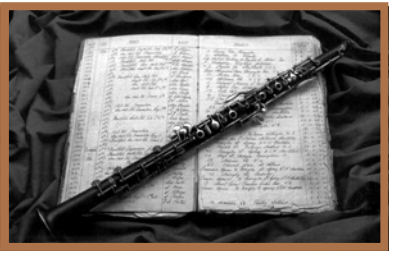


distinctive accents from non-British traditions to the English scene. Terence MacDonagh was the son of an oboist who refused to teach him, preferring to send him abroad to study. He learnt from Louis Bas, the former cor anglais player with the Paris Opéra, and another renowned French oboist of the time, Myrtile Morel. Still, when he returned to England in 1925, he felt it wise to attend the Goossens 'finishing school'. Janet Craxton and Michael Dobson were two other Brits who studied in Paris – in their case with Pierre Bajeux at the Paris Conservatoire. They both exercised profound influence through their example and teaching. Dutch influence was less common; however, after a flourishing start to his career at Covent Garden, James Brown left for Amsterdam to study with Haakon Stotijn.

There was also some American influence. Even though Rothwell did not play professionally during the war-time sojourn in America, her playing changed with the adoption of American-style reeds. Janet Craxton's long w-scrape and hump behind the tip came from the US via Rothwell. In fact Rothwell's musical accent was more cosmopolitan than many. Travelling with her conductor husband exposed her to a wide variety of different musical traditions. After playing a Louis oboe for some time, she adopted a German-made Mönnig that she had converted to the British fingering system with thumbplate and semi-automatic octave keys. At a time when other British players held on to their pre-war French oboes, or the British-made Louis, this choice was something of an anomaly. The instrument had been owned by Hermann Töttcher, the famous German oboist and editor whom Rothwell got to know during her husband's visits to the Berlin Philharmonic. A new English instrument maker was also entering the scene: in 1948 Edward Selwyn bought Howarth oboe serial number 1001, and was probably playing it in the late 1950s when he recorded the Bach track on this CD.

Terence MacDonagh was considered the Prince of the Orchestral Oboists, and as well as this beautiful excerpt from J.C. Bach, he can be heard in distinctive leading parts in many recordings from his period in the RPO. He was previously the cor anglais player at the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and later played first oboe there. Although a fine orchestral musician, MacDonagh disliked playing concertos. Distrustful of 'posh' soloists, he didn't let his students play Sonatas or Concertos in lessons, only orchestral excerpts. Among his students at the RCM were James Brown, John Anderson, Roger Lord and Derek Wickens.

If MacDonagh was Prince in the Orchestras, Michael Dobson and Peter Graeme were the Princes of Freelance. From about 1955, Dobson performed with the London Mozart Players, for a time with the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, and was Yehudi Menuhin's first call for principal oboe in the Bath Festival Orchestra. As much as these players had their own distinctive accents and their own arena of play, they cultivated a lingua franca understood by all. In the game of



Howarth oboe number 1001, photo Peter Beaumon

musical chairs, even London, though far larger than any other scene in Britain, was at the end of the day a small world. It was virtually unavoidable for oboists to cross paths with any or all of their colleagues.

To survive meant to adapt. From one day to the next they were likely to be called on fall in line with a new section of players with quite different training and musical sensibilities. For example, the BBCSO oboe section photograph, taken in the early 1950s shows John Wolfe as principal, with J. C. Pantling, Edward Selwyn and Helen Gaskell. In 1954 Janet Craxton came in as principal and Wolfe stepped down to second, later becoming cor anglais when Helen Gaskell retired. Meanwhile Edward Selwyn and Peter Graeme became friends and colleagues in the English Chamber Orchestra. Two well-known players were cousins: Michael Winfield played second oboe to Janet Craxton in the Hallé, moving to principal in good time for the recording of 'Fennimore and Gerda' on this CD; the cor anglais solo in that same track is played by his cousin Roger. Michael later moved to the Philharmonia and the LSO, Roger to the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the LPO.

The players we hear on this recording were the principals, the stars. But each relied on supportive second players, most of whom have blended into the shadows of history. More than anything the second player's responsibility is to listen and mimic the principal player's accent. The second oboe on the recording of the 'Entry of the Queen of Sheba' was Michael Dobson, as much responsible for the remarkable unanimity of phrasing and articulation as Roger Lord's leading. Lord also much appreciated his long-time second oboe, Harry Lythell, chosen after a short spell of extra work. Harry was one of those players who listened all the time to create a perfect blend, probably using similar instruments. Other great second players were James Brown (2nd to Goossens in studio work, and later to Neil Black in the English Chamber Orchestra), Stanley Smith (2nd to Sutcliffe in the Philharmonia) and Bob Cattermole (2nd to Richard Morgan in the LPO). All of these blended to produce the characteristic accent of the Mid-century British oboe section.

Another second player – and superb cor anglais player in the RPO – was Leonard Brain. Brother of he legendary Dennis Brain, he had studied with Alec Whittaker at the Royal Academy of Music, and as well as being active in the London Baroque Ensemble, London Mozart Players, and English Chamber Orchestra was a member of the Dennis Brain Wind Quintet (founded 1946) and Woodwind Ensemble, of which he took over the direction after his brother died in 1957.

Goossens had been one of the first to take on female students, and was largely responsible for so many fine women oboists in mid-century England. The rise of lady oboists was also a product of the shortage of men during the war. This gave the women a chance to break into the male-dominated orchestral scene. There was even an all-female Portia Ensemble where Mary Murdoch played principal oboe. But these women had real strengths of their own, and the most talented went on to become exceptional soloists.

The First Lady of oboists was of course Evelyn Rothwell. Although very active before the war as an orchestral player, stepping in to jobs that her teacher Goossens passed on to her as well as building her own reputation (she, Natalie James, and Joy Boughton had been the chosen oboe team for Adolf Busch's recording of the Brandenburg Concertos back in 1935), she never went back to that after returning from the USA in 1943, but instead played recitals, chamber music, and film music, as well as appearing as a concerto soloist. In addition to the Mozart concerto, she gave the European première of the Martinů concerto at the London Proms when circumstances prevented the work's dedicatee, Jiří Tancibudek from attending. Two years after recording the Vaughan Williams Concerto with the LSO (July 4-5, 1955), she put down not only the Corelli concerto but her husband's Pergolesi concerto the following day, and the Haydn Concerto less than a month later.

The BBC Symphony Orchestra oboes in the early 1950s,
L to R: John Wolfe, J. C. Pantling, Edward Selwyn, Helen Gaskel

Natalie James was another Goossens pupil, and a good friend of Rothwell's. They shared a flat as students at the RCM. James played Britten's Phantasy Quartet and gave the first performance of his Temporal Variations. After the war she worked as a freelance, with the London Mozart Players, and the London Baroque Ensemble, and in 1951 recorded the Beethoven trio for two oboes and cor anglais with Sutcliffe and Lord (Oboe Classics 'The Oboe 1903-1953').

Joy Boughton was also well known in the Britten-Pears circle as she had been responsible for contracting orchestras for performances in Aldeburgh. Her key role as the inspiration for the most important

Joy Boughton, photo John Vickers, courtesy Rutland Boughton Trust

20th-century work for oboe alone, Britten's Six Metamorphoses, is aptly captured by an early radio recording of the pieces. (The full version is available on Oboe Classics 'Britten, anatomy of a Masterpiece'.)

Janet Craxton was principal in the Hallé, before replacing Wolfe as first oboe in the BBCSO (1954-63). A player with a more modest but immensely beautiful tone, Craxton may have felt that a 10-year stint with the BBC was enough, and went on concentrate on new music with the London Sinfonietta and her London Oboe Quartet (see Oboe Classics 'Janet Craxton, music for oboe and strings').

Compared with today's oboists, these players used lighter reeds that provided easier response and greater potential to vary tone colour and dynamics. We might find this style more individualistic than what is heard among younger players in today's British orchestras who, responding to the pervasive influence of the German and American schools with their emphasis on volume and dark covered sound and correspondingly hard reeds, tend to be more uniform and less willing to stretch the envelope of expressive nuance.

[Articles about many of the players mentioned here can be found in back numbers of Double Reed News, the journal of the British Double Reed Society (available to members at www.bdrs.org.uk). Specifically, many of the players in the orchestras can be found in a series of articles, Who was Where? in editions 26 to 31, February 1994 to June 1995.]



photo Dave Rowell

# The English Oboe School

by Jeremy Polmear

Opinions about how the oboe should be played differ widely, and views are often held strongly, so to discuss the music on this CD I asked for contributions from a number of people:

**Mark Baigent** – too young to have encountered these players directly, Mark has performed both on period instruments with groups such as the English Baroque soloists and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, and contemporary ones including the Pipers 3 oboe trio.

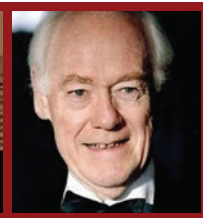
**Neil Black** – established soloist and orchestral player, who was entering the profession at the time of these recordings, and encountered many of these players as senior colleagues.

**Christopher Steward** – record and CD collector, the source of most of these recordings, and former flute/piccolo player with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra; to give a perspective from outside the glasshouse of oboe playing.

**Peter Walden** – for many years the cor anglais player of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and an enthusiast for the oboe in all its guises.

My own connection with the players featured here was that I listened to them on the radio as I was growing up. I travelled up to London sometimes for lessons with Janet Craxton, and when our local orchestra in Canterbury was performing Dvořák's Cello Concerto, I played

Mark Baigent



Neil Black

Christopher Steward, photo Jeremy Polmear

Peter Walden, photo Jeremy Polmear

with my first professional. They had brought him down from London to handle the tricky second oboe part. I shall keep him anonymous (he is not on this CD), because to my eyes he had a distinctly seedy air about him. His oboe, too, seemed to be held together with sellotape. He smoked throughout the rehearsal, and when he had to play something he would lodge his cigarette in the keywork – somewhere near the C sharp hole, as I remember. He played the second movement solo perfectly.

I started by asking the panel if, based on the performances here, can we say there was such a thing as an English oboe school, as distinct from the French, German or American ones.

**Neil Black**: Yes, there was certainly an English style, because no player of the period could possibly escape the Goossens influence.

**Jeremy Polmear**: But most other players, including you, don't play like Goossens.

**Neil Black**: No, but I admired Goossens, I admired his total control, as if he could do anything. I was also influenced by Terry [Terence] MacDonagh, and indeed tried to imitate his style, but found I couldn't. I noticed that he had very light reeds, and used the resonance of his own body to make a full but flexible sound.

**Peter Walden**: Goossens was indeed a strong character in every way. He was a great communicator, he always 'said' something, and it was hard not to come under that influence. But Terry would say to me "Play like you, not like you-know-who, doing rubato all the time." Terry's goal was to make the sound 'shimmer', especially in the upper register. Delicacy and imagination were all-important to him – "like swansdown", he would say. But he also went for vast contrasts, digging into the sound like a cellist. In some ways his musicianship couldn't be contained by the oboe.

**Jeremy Polmear**: What other strands were there?

**Neil Black**: Another pupil of Goossens was Peter Graeme, though with his almost vibrato-free style, he perhaps represents what oboe playing in England was like before Goossens came along.

**Jeremy Polmear**: Some playing, yes; though on a previous Oboe Classics CD Goossens is quoted as saying that his predecessor at the Queen's Hall Orchestra, William Malsch, was dropped because his tone set Sir Henry Wood's teeth on edge!

**Peter Walden**: Then there is Roger Lord, playing with less rubato than some, but with an incredible sense of line, like a good singer.

**Jeremy Polmear**: Mark, you didn't know these players personally. Do you hear a 'school' of playing here, something they have in common?

**Mark Baigent**: It's an open and bright sound, free and fluid. There is a beautiful singing quality in so many of these solos. The willingness to put in rubatos means that the rhythms are fluid, and the style is plaintive. Some of the phrases are very long! Vibrato is an inherent part of the sound compared to some other schools where there is either no vibrato, or quite a fast uncontrolled one, but nothing purposeful, slow and mannered as you hear in this recording. I believe the English thumbplate oboe system, where you take the thumb off instead of adding a finger for c, helps to create that open sound to some degree; the conservatoire ring system oboes I have of that time seem to have a different inherent quality.

**Jeremy Polmear**: Turning now to the music, do you see differences in how Baroque music was approached then, compared to now?

**Neil Black**: In those days there was a big difference between the university academic who might study ornamentation, and the working oboist who didn't. If it wasn't written in the part you didn't play it! But things were beginning to change, and Peter Graeme's track has Thurston Dart – one of the first people to be both academic and performer - playing continuo.

**Mark Baigent**: The approach is very different. Having spent years playing and loving baroque classical and romantic lightness and sounds with period instruments, I find that what today's performances lack is something soulful. This English singing style for me touches the heart and goes straight into you. Today everything is too accurate – in sound, rhythm – and dull for it. The era on this CD is about emotion and femininity. Nowadays, whether it's period or modern instruments it is about accuracy of ensemble and making a heavy sound which makes everything dull. If you listen to Heinz Holliger – I know he's not on this CD, but he's another oboist of the recent past – you stop hearing him after a while and hear the music. Now people want you to hear the instrument, and at the beginning of a solo I start thinking 'wow what a sound…' but after the first few bars I get bored! I will continue to love period performance, yet what I really miss is the expression that seems to have peaked in the British school of oboe playing represented here. People have stopped listening to the music and only care about the sound.

**Jeremy Polmear**: That's really good to hear, but on a more prosaic note I have to say that I listened to several performances of Baroque music from this time that were leaden, monotonous, and over-serious. They are not on this CD! Continuing this theme: what else have we gained in the 21st Century, and what have we lost, compared to the 1950s?

**Neil Black**: Instruments are better now – tuning for example – and they can also make a bigger sound to ride the orchestra. The danger is that delicacy can be lost; but at its best, a player like Jonathan Kelly can play on a modern setup and combine freedom, beauty, and musicianship. But things are in danger of becoming more alike.

**Christopher Steward**: And that's partly the influence of the gramophone, much as I like it. Inevitably, customers want accurate performances.

**Mark Baigent**: Sadly, this is true of many period performances too. We are often told not to ornament freely, not to do ornaments on recordings that may not stand repeated listening, and sometimes not even to do cadential trills unless everybody in the ensemble has agreed to do them. We are stiffening up!

**Christopher Steward**: And people can listen to each other much more now.

**Peter Walden**: An influential, globe-trotting, conductor can enjoy working with player A in one orchestra – perhaps I'd better not mention names – then move to a different orchestra and instruct player B to sound like player A. And to be fair, orchestral players themselves might reject someone because they didn't fit in with the sound they wanted in the section.

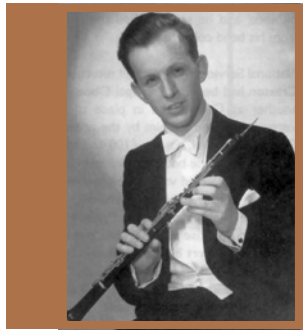
**Christopher Steward**: In 1957 the flute section of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra changed completely, when Gerald Jackson was replaced by Geoffrey Gilbert. It was to the credit of Sir Thomas Beecham that he allowed such changes, and allowed individuality to flourish in his wind section – picking good players and letting them play. However, not all conductors are so enlightened!

**Jeremy Polmear**: And we are more conservative nowadays?

**Peter Walden**: Yes, everything is fashion. People feel safe, going with the crowd, rather than listening for the best. It's the PR mentality.



# Track Notes and Commentary



Michael Winfield in 1948

1. **Michael Winfield**
   **(with Roger Winfield, cor anglais)**
   Delius: Intermezzo from Fennimore and Gerda; Hallé Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli

The Intermezzo is actually two Preludes from Delius's last opera, linked together by his amanuensis Eric Fenby in 1945. Fenby says that the music evokes tranquil scenes at harvest time, and adds "The characteristic sound of Léon Goossens' oboe is indelibly associated in my mind with the exquisite ebb and flow of his playing in these lovely miniatures."

**Peter Walden**: You can tell this is not Goossens here – he would be more passionate. Michael can back away from a phrase, be a cog in the music. He's an orchestral player to the fingertips – notice how the first phrase [0:10] isn't quite co-ordinated with the strings. The second time [0:24] he changes his rubato to make sure it works. It's such tasteful playing. Michael was very good on reeds, so his control is good right to the end, with those final low Es [4:30].

**Christopher Steward**: There's a very nice dialogue between Michael and Oliver Bannister on the flute – both players are flexible in sound. Michael achieves a wonderful sense of hesitancy at the beginning, becoming more definite as the piece goes on.

**Mark Baigent**: This is so English – exactly what we have been talking about! An almost ethereal ghostlike sound from Michael Winfield, yet open and expressive.

**Peter Walden**: And let's not forget the perfectly judged cor anglais contribution [2:30] from Michael's cousin Roger Winfield. Every cor player knows the challenge of sitting in an orchestra, waiting for your moment!

Michael Winfield's own memory of playing under Barbirolli, not only Delius, was "fantastic". And – pace Peter Walden's comment on the ensemble – "He'd say to the strings 'listen out for the oboist taking a breath'."

2. **Leonard Brain and Sidney Sutcliffe**
   Mozart: Divertimento in E flat K 289 – Minuet; Dennis Brain Wind Ensemble: Leonard Brain & Sidney Sutcliffe (oboes); Dennis Brain & Neill Sanders (horns); John Alexandra & Paul Draper (bassoons)

This track was originally issued on a 78 rpm disc with the catalogue number HMS 80, HMS standing for the History of Music in Sound; only this movement and the Adagio were recorded. This somewhat academic approach to our musical past was more common then, and perhaps explains why the interpretation is less dance-like than how we might play it today.

It is surprising to see that his second oboe on this occasion was Sidney (universally known as Jock) Sutcliffe, much better known as a principal player. He wasn't the regular player, but if a deputy was needed and Jock was free, he would step in.

**Christopher Steward**: Jock makes a very good second oboe!

**Mark Baigent**: This is a good example of the rather stiff, inflexible style of classical performance from this era. Heavy upbeats and long lines of notes with little phrasing! Having said that, it's wonderful to hear Leonard Brain's sweet sound and light vibrato.

The music was composed as banquet music for the archiepiscopal court at Salzburg in 1777. Alfred Einstein says of this, and similar Serenades: "If any works characterise Mozart as an 18th-century composer it is these; they are 'innocent' in every sense, written as it were before the fall from grace – the French Revolution – written for summer nights under the light of torches and lamps, to be heard close by and from afar."

3. **Edward Selwyn**
   Bach: Ich habe genug (from Cantata No. 82); Gérard Souzay (baritone), Geraint Jones Orchestra, Geraint Jones

In Ich habe genug (literally 'I have enough') Bach is expressing, as musicologist Julian Mincham says in his guide to the cantatas "that instant when body and soul come to rest and are resigned and in complete harmony. Bach encapsulates this experience of peace and acquiescent submission beyond anything that mere words can convey." He also points out that the only times the singer imitates the flowing oboe arabesques [4:42 and 6:15], it is on the word Freude – joy.



[www.jsbachcantatas.com/documents/chapter-36-bwv-82.htm]

**Peter Walden**: that's quite a Germanic style, but it's flexible at the same time.

**Neil Black**: Edward had a strong vibrato, he moved his reed in his mouth. I've always loved the way he played Bach.

**Christopher Steward**: There's a lovely flow to the music. Even in the most ornate passages, he still keeps the shape. There is always a pulse, and a direction.

**Mark Baigent**: This performance stands the test of time. Gorgeous playing whose pleading vibrato touches the heart and whose cheeky twists and turns can't help to bring a smile. Fantastic!

**Peter Walden**: For me, this is one of the loveliest things written for the oboe; and it's very heartfelt playing.

4. **Janet Craxton**
   Handel: Concerto in no 3 in G minor (ed. Minchinton) – Grave (First movement); Collegium Musicum Londinii, John Minchinton

**Neil Black**: It's beautiful, a very successful recording, with ornaments (said to be by Michael Tippett), sounding just right to me and the sound owing a lot to Evelyn Rothwell, who was influenced by US players.

**Christopher Steward**: The ornaments sound 'rehearsed' by today's standards, but that's not necessarily a bad thing, just different. When I was transcribing the recording, I put the sound through various algorithms, and one of the things that shows up is that her trills are incredibly even – not like some others on the CD!

**Peter Walden**: Yes it's impeccable, and uniform, but perhaps a bit static. And the vibrato, coming from the diaphragm, can be a little inflexible.

**Mark Baigent**: Janet Craxton does play with a more solid sound, a stricter sense of rhythm and narrower vibrato, but produces some beautifully sung and warm sounding music. For me it's tending towards our more modern school of playing, and yet it hasn't lost the oboe's singing and transparent sound.

**Jeremy Polmear**: I've always admired the care she took. I don't find the interpretation static, I always see where it's going. I love the way she can soften the tone [0:59], or introduce an intimacy into the phrasing [2:10]. I've listened to her a lot, and never fail to be drawn into that sound. Ultimately, I suppose, it's a personal thing. It works for me!

5. **Léon Goossens**
Mozart: Concerto in C – Allegro Aperto (First movement, cadenza: Goossens); Sinfonia of London, Colin Davis

Léon Goossens recorded this best-known of all oboe concertos at the age of 63, by which time he was a National Treasure. The accident that affected his embouchure was two years in the future.

**Neil Black**: I made some reeds for him later in his career, and he spoke about many things, but not about this particular concerto. He came late to it, and perhaps it wasn't in his blood as was, for example, the Mozart Oboe Quartet. But the performance has his lightness of touch.

**Peter Walden**: Yes, he has some technical problems, and he found his tonguing speed deteriorating as he got older; but that lightness of touch is unique. And he is such a communicator! He is telling us 'this is how it goes'. And even if it isn't how we would play it, we get carried along. And if the orchestra phrases something slightly differently – well, that's their problem. And his wonderful cadenza. He follows the rules, uses some of Mozart's phrases. But that cadenza is pure Goossens!

**Mark Baigent**: I listened to this recording many times as a youngster – Goossens' playing is amazing. Yes, period instrument oboists take the work at a faster tempo and perform it with more bravura and often a richer sound, but what can better this? It is delicate, feminine, expressive and lacks for nothing.

6. **Evelyn Rothwell**
Corelli: Concerto, arr. Barbirolli from violin sonatas; Preludio – Adagio; Allemanda – Allegro (First & Second movements); Hallé Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli

These charming little movements come from a concerto arranged for her by Sir John, and when the LP was first issued it was a huge seller in the UK.

**Neil Black**: I am very glad to hear this track. Evelyn is able to sing without some of the mannerisms of Goossens.

**Christopher Steward**: But she has one – those long upbeats followed by a short main note [2:27, 2:28 and elsewhere] – that's from Goossens.

**Mark Baigent**: Those long upbeat notes, along with trills starting before the beat, show the old style of performance. Like Janet [Craxton], I always felt that Evelyn Rothwell had a heavier, more exact way of playing. Her vibrato, though, is wider than Janet's, and her oboe really sings for it; she could be a singer presenting this music.

**Jeremy Polmear**: Come to think of it, I think I do long upbeats too, even now, if I'm trying to sound perky – which this performance certainly is. That second movement has great exuberance. And because this is an arrangement, we don't have to worry too much about Baroque style – she brings out the beauties of the first movement very well.



7. **John Barnett**
Britten: Prince of the Pagodas – Dance of Belle Rose; Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Benjamin Britten

Britten wrote this ballet soon after a visit to Bali, and he includes a Gamelan orchestra. The story has an Old Emperor with two daughters. The elder, haughty and heir to the throne, is called Belle Epine, and the younger, beautiful but neglected one, Belle Rose. It is the fortunes of this Cinderella-like figure that the ballet follows, and this is her dance.

**Neil Black**: John Barnett's great skill was his flexibility and great singing ability. I have also heard him in Rosenkavalier, out-singing anyone on stage.

**Peter Walden**: It's a very sensitive performance, with a rhythmic elasticity that sounds very natural.

**Mark Baigent**: He has an extraordinary ability to draw the listener to the music rather than to himself.

**Christopher Steward**: He really makes it sound 'organic', unfolding naturally. It sounds as if this is the way the music should inevitably go. It's a masterclass in the art of ebb and flow.

**Jeremy Polmear**: And the result is a touching portrayal of sadness.

John Barnett remembers the session. "I was trying out a new oboe that day; I liked the sound, but it was too small and I didn't use it again." And working with Benjamin Britten? "He could be quite nasty to people, but I always got on well with him – he seemed to take a shine to my playing."

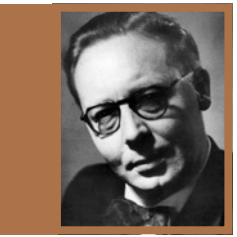
8. **Joy Boughton**
Britten: Arethusa (last movement of Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op 49), BBC broadcast

The plummy voice of the BBC announcer reminds us that this is from a live broadcast made a year after the work's composition (elsewhere in the performance you can hear the reed being sucked in preparation).

**Neil Black**: I had lessons with Joy, and she was very good. I was surprised at the halting way that her Arethusa begins, considering that she learnt it with Britten; but the second half of it is terrific, I think.

**Jeremy Polmear**: Her Arethusa does initially seem to be rather rooted to the spot. Maybe it's that waterfall-like passage [1:17] that she's worried about, especially as it comes three times. I've heard very illustrious players fall off that passage in live performances! However, the watery trills [1:35] are fine, and it's a splendid finish, with legs and water becoming one.

**Christopher Steward**: Yes, it's an intriguing performance, and there is a good sense of narrative through the piece.



Sidney Sutcliffe

9. **Sidney Sutcliffe and Natalie James**
   Mozart: Serenade in C minor, K 388 - Allegro (first movement); London Baroque Ensemble: Sidney Sutcliffe & Natalie James (oboes); Jack Brymer & Stephen Waters (clarinets); Cecil James & Edward Wilson (bassoons); Dennis Brain & Neill Sanders (horns); Karl Haas

Mozart's celebrated C minor Serenade is a world away from the simple delights of K 289, and this track might have been included whoever the first oboe was, for the way the group creates a driving intensity, with an energy that lasts right through the movement. However, the first oboe was Jock Sutcliffe, beautifully matched by Natalie James.

**Peter Walden**: Jock was a very special chap, he looked after me when I was a young second oboe. He was a great team player, with lots of respect for his fellow principals – and for the music.

**Christopher Steward**: He had such a range of note length – they weren't just short or long.

**Peter Walden**: He knows exactly what he's doing. "A touch less", he'd say, and he would also ask "which note is the most important?". Those pairs of repeated notes with the bassoon near the beginning [0:21 and 0:23] seem just right! Another example is in the second half, where he takes over from the clarinet [4:08], and ends the phrase by emphasizing the high note not the low one – "just how you'd sing it, laddie" – with timing that heightens the drama of that silent bar [4:13].

**Jeremy Polmear**: And we must credit Karl Haas and the whole group with the way they play those repeated quavers following the quaver rest [1:24 etc] – terrific impetus without actually rushing. Before the final statement of the second subject [5:45], Jock allows himself a very slight moment, not enough to spoil the momentum. And if Natalie James' husband Cecil is a bit loud a few bars later, who cares? This is splendid wind ensemble playing.

10. **Terence MacDonagh**
    J. C. Bach: Symphony in B flat, Op. 18 - Andante (Second movement); RPO, Charles Gerhardt

There are already three historical versions of this solo on the Oboe Classics label ('The Oboe 1903-1953'), but I make no apologies for including a fourth.



Terence MacDonagh, photo Tully Potter

**Peter Walden**: See, that very first note has the 'shimmer'.

**Jeremy Polmear**: He's actually got quite a fast vibrato.

**Peter Walden**: Yes, but it's inside the sound, like a string player. Not an extra add-on. And when he plays an echo [1:06] he increases the intensity, if anything.

**Christopher Steward**: It's a radiant sound.

**Mark Baigent**: It sounds so careful and caressed, like he's holding a delicate object in his hands.

**Peter Walden**: "Get away from the notes", Terry used to say, "they are just blobs on the page." But the music, and the airstream, is continuous. He thought about everything, and made lots of markings in his parts. He thought that the 'inspiration of the moment' was balderdash.

**Jeremy Polmear**: It may be well prepared, but he makes it all seem very natural.

**Peter Walden**: Terry used to say "If they know it's rubato, you've failed."

11. **Janet Craxton and Michael Winfield**
    Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake – Scene & Dance of the Little Swans; Hallé Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli

This is a very early example of Janet Craxton's orchestral playing. It was recorded in October 1950, the year she joined the Hallé aged 21.

**Peter Walden**: Although Janet's playing seems as far away from Goossens as you can get, there is actually some Goossens influence there, in the three transitional quavers [0:14]. She very slightly holds the first one, then speeds up. That's Goossens!

**Mark Baigent**: In this track, she still has influences – the vibrato, too, is wider than what she ended up with.

**Jeremy Polmear**: Yet it is recognisably her.

**Peter Walden**: And the Dance has poise, as in everything she did.

12. **Roger Lord**
Brahms: Violin Concerto – start of Adagio (Second Movement); Henryk Szerying (violin), LSO, Pierre Monteux

The CD 'The Oboe 1903-1953' also contains no fewer than four recordings of this celebrated solo, but again, no apologies are made for adding Roger Lord's superlative version.

**Peter Walden**: This is another example of the vibrato coming from inside the sound.

**Christopher Steward**: Yes, a bad vibrato can bruise the sound. And listen to that lovely attack on the top B flat [1:24]. The later phrases are rounded off beautifully.

**Jeremy Polmear**: Overall, the solo has a lovely shape to it, he knows exactly where he's going.

**Peter Walden**: Any good playing sounds easy, and natural.

**Mark Baigent**: In the right hands, this solo doesn't need a violin to take it over!

**Jeremy Polmear**: And we mustn't forget that little second oboe contribution too [1:01]. So often it can sound strained, or dull.

Roger Lord himself thinks the second oboe on that occasion was his regular second, Harry Lythell. "I mainly remember that day because I got held up, and was late arriving for the session. Monteux insisted on starting with the second movement, so when I arrived Gervase [de Peyer] was playing it on the clarinet!"

13. **Roger Lord and Michael Dobson**
Handel: Arrival of the Queen of Sheba (Solomon); LSO, George Weldon

The players are not mentioned on the LP sleeve, but Roger is fairly sure that his partner on that occasion was Michael Dobson. Apart from its intrinsic musical qualities, this track is included to demonstrate that the 1950s could produce light, perky and dance-like versions of Baroque music. The oboe playing is expert, the two players perfectly matched, with the short staccato playing that was fashionable at the time.

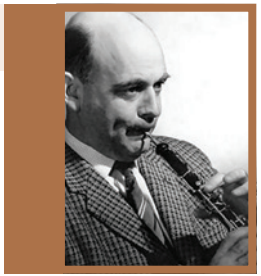
**Mark Baigent**: A much-played piece, here performed at a speed to match any period performance. Yes, the style is slightly different in that staccato is less articulate these days, but there is some lovely shaping.

14. **Peter Graeme**
Handel: Concerto Grosso Op. 3 No. 2 in B flat – Largo (Second movement); Boyd Neel Orchestra, with Thurston Dart (organ), Boyd Neel

**Christopher Steward**: This is good, honest playing. Not over-sophisticated, there's no baggage.

**Peter Walden**: There's a hollowness in the sound, and I mean that as a compliment; it's straight, with nothing added. And a very nice G to A trill [1:08]!





Peter Graeme

**Jeremy Polmear**: I love the simple approach, and the willingness to trust Handel's melody.

**Mark Baigent**: Peter Graeme, or 'Timmy' to his friends and colleagues, is someone I actually have met! He was a wonderful, gentle man and this comes across in this performance. It has a simple almost apologetic sound about it, yet every note is placed just right. You almost stop listening to the oboe itself and are transported elsewhere.

15. **Sidney Sutcliffe**
Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 – Andante (Second movement); Gareth Morris (flute), Hugh Bean (violin), Sidney Sutcliffe (oboe); Philharmonia Orchestra, Otto Klemperer

**Jeremy Polmear**: This is such a slow version – surely you wouldn't dare play it at this speed nowadays – yet it never sits down.

**Christopher Steward**: It's slow, but always moves through the whole bar.

**Jeremy Polmear**: And the continuo playing is delightfully airy.

**Peter Walden**: Jock would say things like "it is a great honour to play with these distinguished colleagues". It's this attitude that can make a great ensemble player.

16 and 17.
**Everybody. Solos, Terence MacDonagh and Sidney Sutcliffe**
Handel: Music for the Royal Fireworks – Bourrées and Minuets; Pro Arte Orchestra, Charles Mackerras

Well, not quite everybody. The exact list of players has not survived, but James Brown's list in the booklet, taken from what can be seen in the photo, is impressive.

**Mark Baigent**: The performers sound like they are having a great deal of fun.

**Neil Black**: I can still remember Jock sitting back, and Terry tense and forward. As to the overall result – we weren't so bad in those far-off days!

Recording the Fireworks Music, tracks 16 and 17. No official list of players has survived, but James (Jimmy) Brown supplied the following list: A -Terence MacDonagh; B - Sidney Sutcliffe; C - Evelyn Barbirolli; D - Peter Graeme; E - Leonard Brain; F - James MacGillivray; G: Stan Smith; H: Edward Selwyn; I - Mary Murdoch; J - Roger Lord; K - John Barnett; L - Michael Dobson; M - Aubrey Johnson; N - Donald Bridger; O - Ian Black; P - Denis Wood; Q - Peter Boswell; R - Philip Jones; S - Helen Gaskell; T - Eddie Pogson (?); U - Alan Wardley (?); V - Bob Cattermole; W - James Brown; X - Neil Black