Oboe classics
CC2035

mid-20th Century music from Britain and France

Vive la différence

Anthony Robb flute | Jeremy Polmear oboe | Michael Bell piano

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Edward Naylor's Trio is recorded here
by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Emmanuel College,
Cambridge. It is unpublished. Those interested in this work should contact
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Oboe classics

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Jean-Michel Damase (1928-2013)
Trio (1961)

1	*Molto moderato - Allegro - Moderato*	6:20
2	*Allegretto con spirito*	3:33
3	*Allegro scherzando*	4:37
4	*Moderato - Andante*	5:45

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)
D'un Matin de Printemps (1918)
(première recording in this arrangement)

5	*Assez anime - Mysterioso - Assez anime*	4:48

Jacques Ibert (1890-1962)
Deux Interludes (1946)

6	*Andante espressivo*	2:59
7	*Allegro vivo*	3:50

Frederick Delius (1863-1934)
Intermezzo from 'Fennimore & Gerda' (1910)

8	*Very quietly, not dragging - Very slow*	4:20

Gordon Jacob (1895-1984)
Trio (1958)

9	*Allegro*	2:43
10	*Adagio*	5:28
11	*Allegro - poco meno mosso - Tempo I*	2:40
12	*Allegro molto*	3:27

Edward Naylor (1867-1934)
Trio (1924) (première recording)

13	*Moderato semplice*	4:01

Eugene Goossens (1893-1962)
Pastoral and Harlequinade (1924)

14	*Andante con moto - piu mosso - Tempo I*	2:21
15	*Allegro*	4:18

Total Time 61 minutes

« la musique française, c'est la clarté, l'élégance, la déclamation simple et naturelle ; la musique française veut, avant tout, faire plaisir » [French music is clarity, elegance and simple and natural declaration; above all, French music wants to please.] *Claude Debussy*

"I am drawn to English music because it reflects the climate and the vegetation which know no sharp edges... it is a very human music, not given to shattering utterances, to human emotion in the abstract, but to a single person's experience." *Yehudi Menuhin*

The musical cultures of Britain and France in the mid-twentieth century were very different. **France** was ever moving away from German Romanticism, first with the Impressionism of Debussy and Ravel, then with the revolution of Erik Satie, Jean Cocteau and Les Six, the presence of Stravinsky, and the teaching of Nadia Boulanger making France (specifically, Paris) the centre of the western classical music world.

Britain, too, was doing well. After a century of hosting foreign artists and enjoying the creativity of others, composers such as Parry and Stanford began a musical renaissance, giving rise to a rich harvest of works from the likes of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Bliss, Maconchy, Bax and Britten. (All these composers wrote chamber music for the oboe.)

What is noticeable in the collection on this album is how the British composers are influenced by the French, but not the other way around. Given the supremacy of Paris at the time this is not surprising.

As well as describing a delightful collection of pieces for flute, oboe and piano, these notes also consider if the generalisations of Debussy and Menuhin can be applied to this music from our two countries.

SECTION 1 - FRANCE

Tracks 1-4: Damase, Trio (1961)

The portentous opening of the Trio by **Jean-Michel Damase** would not seem to fit into Debussy's generalisation - until the mood changes abruptly into a jaunty canon at 1:26. This is a typical Damase trick; as he says, "in other scores I write quite grave introductions, moving to a theme 'clair' and tonal, as a contrast." There are many more contrasts to come, but for the meantime the oboe chases the flute through a series of keys, or the other way round, like a pair of butterflies. Gradually the piano becomes more active a participant; Damase was a pianist as well as composer, and he wrote this virtuoso part for himself to play. At 3:04 he takes a solo in a gentle variation, leading to an explosive 4-bar section (never to be repeated) at 3:19. The progress of this movement, sometimes by gradual evolution, sometimes by abrupt juxtaposition, is also a notable characteristic of the music of Francis Poulenc.

The complex canon reasserts itself, the musical tension builds, until at 4:06 the butterflies finally unite. And out of this comes a tender, bitter-sweet theme reminiscient of a French *chanson* (4:36) which is going to appear in various forms throughout the work.

The coda begins at 5:18; flute and oboe play the theme at quarter speed while the piano keeps up harp-like arabesques for a while (Damase's mother was a harpist), until all reverts to silence.

The **second movement** begins with another abrupt mood change - this time into what sounds like the world of Italian opera. Music for wind instruments based on operatic themes was popular in the Salons of 19th-Century Paris; perhaps Damase had been listening to the *Duo Brilliant* from William Tell written for this combination by Demersseman and Berthélèmy.

At 0:53 the oboe takes off on a completely different theme in triple time while the piano remains in four. More new material occurs at 1:43 and at 2:19; it sounds as if Damase is having fun shoe-horning themes together - yet with his skill as a melodic composer he somehow manages to maintain a sense of continuity. At 2:47 there is a return of the tender theme from the first movement, and as it subsides the piano starts to remind us how far we've come from the start of the movement. This is Damase the master story-teller.

The **third movement** is a scherzo, with a circus-like mood beloved of the composers of *Les Six*. The piano virtuosity reaches new heights. Yet soon (0:50) there is a more gentle theme,

reminiscent of the previous movement. The scherzo reasserts itself at 1:40, but at 1:53 the tender theme reappears, this time with flute an octave below oboe. Damase continues to integrate his material with apparent ease. Then things begin to come apart (3:29), and the movement ends unsettled, a long way from where it started. Setting us up, perhaps for...

... the **fourth movement** and its return to material from the very start of the piece. The 'theme clair', when it arrives at 1:43, is very different from what has come before. It uses previous material, but there is a valedictory quality about it, gloriously sustained throughout the movement. Damase shows us the journey we have been on throughout the piece; and then the music dies.

No British composer would have written like this, and certainly no German. Most 20th Century French music was determined not to emulate German Romanticism - hence, partly, the enthusiasm of Les Six not only for circus music, but neo-classicism and American jazz. However there is a richness to Damase's writing for the piano which perhaps reaches further back in French tradition to Saint-Saëns, another composer/pianist, and one who wrestled with his attitudes to Schumann, Liszt and Wagner.

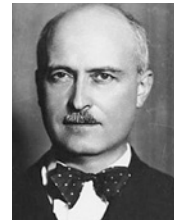
And how does it live up to Debussy's stereotype? Very well, in my opinion, but we might add that as well as wanting to please us, Damase is a master of creating an ambiguity of feeling to rival Poulenc's - one that makes this music continue to touch us long after it has finished.

Track 5: Lili Boulanger, D'un Matin de Printemps (1918)

The connection between Debussy's pronouncement and Lili Boulanger's **D'un Matin de Printemps** is even closer. This is an impression of the feeling of a Spring morning, and is a complete delight. Perhaps not quite complete: there is an uneasy section, where we understand that summer has not yet arrived. But the predominant mood is joyful anticipation - even more impressive given that it was written in 1918, the year that Lili Boulanger died aged 24.

Chamber versions of this piece exist - for Piano Trio, Flute and Piano, Violin and Piano; it is not clear how much these are by Lili or by her sister Nadia. For the version on this album I went to the orchestral score, to honour as much as possible Lili's brilliant orchestral effects by augmenting the existing flute, piccolo, oboe and cor anglais parts. Michael Bell takes up the rest on the piano.

Tracks 6-7: Ibert, Deux Interludes (1946)



Jacques Ibert was from the same era as the composers of Les Six, but did not join them. However he did share many of their musical values (as well as Debussy's) in these Deux Interludes. They were written as incidental music to the play *The Seducer* by Suzanne Lilar, and were originally scored for flute, violin and harpsichord or harp. The first one is reminiscent of the Baroque Loure, a slow dance in triple time that can be found in composers such as Lully. There is an animated middle section, but the overall mood is poised and wistful.

Several French composers had looked West to Spain rather than East to Germany (notably Ravel with his *Rhapsodie Espagnole*, *Pièce en forme de Habañera* and *Boléro)*; here Ibert writes in the Flamenco style. The piano undertakes the work of the guitar, and I double on cor anglais, influenced by Rodrigo's use of the instrument in the slow movement of his *Concerto de Aranjuez*.

SECTION 2 - BRITAIN

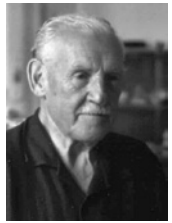
Track 8: Delius, Intermezzo from 'Fennimore and Gerda' (1910)

The Intermezzo of **Frederick Delius** seems to embody Yehudi Menuhin's stereotype; not so much a description of the English countryside, but a personal vision of it - dreamlike and melancholic. This is an early version of what has become known as the 'English Pastoral' school of composition.

But appearances can be deceptive. Delius has said that his only meaningful studies in composition came from Thomas Ward in Jacksonville, Florida, while he was managing an orange plantation, and where he realised that "a sense of flow is the main thing, and it doesn't matter how you do it as long as you master it". What's more the rural, secluded spot where Delius wrote this piece was not England, but in Grez-sur-Loing, France, where he lived most of his life.

The Intermezzo is in fact two Intermezzi - orchestral interludes from the opera 'Fennimore and Gerda'. Delius' amanuensis Eric Fenby made this arrangement in 1987 for the Oriel Trio.The second Intermezzo starts at 1:58; the preceding four bars are by Fenby, but otherwise the flute and oboe parts are almost identical to Delius' own scoring.

Tracks 9-12: Jacob, Trio (1958)



There are certainly none of Menuhin's 'shattering utterances' in the Trio by **Gordon Jacob**. His entry in Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* describes his music as "marked by sterling craftsmanship and clarity, economy and directness" and these qualities are immediately evident in the opening of the **first movement**. The clear, neo-classical feeling was presumably encouraged by the fact that he wrote it for the Sylvan Trio of John Francis, Joy Boughton and the harpsichordist Millicent Silver. This may also explain the predominance of quiet dynamics, Jacob not wishing modern wind instruments to drown the harpsichord. The music bounces along, evoking a parallel with the early compositions of Malcolm Arnold, a pupil of Jacob. There is also an underlying unease in both men's music, too, though expressed in different ways. In this first movement the chromatic slides and frequent key changes add an element of uncertainty to an apparently jovial piece.

In the **second movement** the unease becomes overt. The opening oboe solo followed by a mock-medieval piano solo reminded we performers, rather surprisingly, of Hindemith. Flute and oboe enter in canon, and after 2:02 the oboe has a number of solos, punctuated by the flute. These are strongly felt but devoid of sentimentality or Romanticism. The coda maintains the unsettled feeling.

The **third movement** is more straightforward - in effect, a minuet and trio. Flute and oboe hop about until the trio section at 0:55. This starts with another highly chromatic oboe solo, soon joined by the flute, the two instruments weaving together in a complex passage. At 1:48 the texture clears to a gentle piece of *chinoiserie* that seems to be echoing Ravel in a very French expression of melancholy. As ever, Jacob's expert craftsmanship is evident: this is highly original writing for flute and oboe, yet it sounds completely natural. At 2:52 the minuet returns, written as before in quiet dynamics. Eventually, poise is sacrificed for noise, followed by an ending of which Malcolm Arnold would have approved.

For the **fourth movement**, flute changes to piccolo for what could be circus music, except that circus bands aren't often marked piano. Dynamics increase to a central section at 0:48, where Jacob plays with louds and softs; the main theme returns (now forte) at 1:26, and Jacob continues to play with dynamics and registers until the final chord.

In writing this piece, Gordon Jacob may well have been influenced by French characteristics. Apart from the *chinoiserie* mentioned above, there is a sparseness in the writing, and an absurd humour (especially in the last movement) that would be understood in France. There is also, as mentioned before, the possible influence of Hindemith; British composers were not averse to German music.

Both composers were known for their neo-classicism, their expert craftsmanship, their writing for wind instruments, and their use of shifting tonalities. Yet for all that, he sounds like a British composer: the continuity of the writing, the humour of deliberate 'wrong notes', and the sadness of the slow sections that seem to revel in their pain. French music can be spare in its writing, Jacob here sometimes sounds Spartan.

Track 13: Naylor, Trio (1954)

Organ of Emmanuel College, photo (detail) by Chris Huang)

Edward Woodall Naylor was an organist and composer, and for insight into his music we need to go back to the English choral tradition which continued through the 19th Century and was taken up by Parry and Stanford. Indeed, in preparing for this performance, we found that it was listening to Naylor's choral music that proved the most useful interpretative key. Something singable is also going to make it fit with Menuhin's description of music with 'no sharp edges'. It would not be described as being of the 'English Pastoral' school, but its gentle descending scales might remind one of a rippling stream.

The piece is expertly written and satisfying to play - and that is how it came to be rediscovered by the wind players Chris and Frances Nex. Making chamber music with the daughter of a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (with which Naylor had a long association), she produced two Quartets by him, which were so enjoyable to play that they asked if there was more - and this Trio is the result, taken from the College Library.

Tracks 14-15: Goossens, Pastoral and Harlequinade (1924)

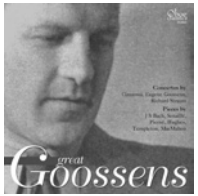
Was the conductor and composer **Sir Eugene Aynsley Goossens** British? Certainly; he was born in Camden Town, north London. And he dropped the accent of his father, the French-born violinist and conductor Eugène Goossens. Both were educated in Bruges, but Eugene studied music at Liverpool, and at the Royal College of Music under Stanford. He was cosmopolitan: by the time he wrote this piece (for his brother Léon, who had formed the Philharmonic Trio with the flautist Albert Fransella and pianist Francesco Ticciati) he had already conducted the UK première of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, and was beginning to get work in the US. His music was affected by that of Debussy and Ravel, and this piece is sometimes known as *Pastorale et Arlequinade*. In my opinion this is simply because it was published in France. Nevertheless, it does pose the question: how 'British' is this music?

The opening melodies flute and oboe in the **Pastoral** are undoubtedly in the English

tradition, and would be called 'quintessential' had they been harmonised by Vaughan Williams. But Goossens' harmony is unsettling, with a succession of thick, unresolved chords. (This quality is also noticeable in Eugene's other composition for Léon - the Oboe Concerto of 1927.) The music flows smoothly (Delius would have approved) until some birdsong introduces a faster passage at 2:07. It soon settles back and the original theme resumes, to the accompaniment of birdsong.

The **Harlequinade** is part of a pantomime that developed in England between the 17th and mid-19th centuries, where the harlequin and the clown play the principal parts. In the arresting opening, flute and oboe swap appoggiaturas like juggling balls, and the movement continues in the same vein with an assortment of tricks, some overt (a sudden piano glissando), some more subtle as in the crossrhythms designed to trip up the listener, and hopefully not the performer. Being English music, there is a sadness among the clowning. But we still need to end our act with a flourish; so with one bound we are out.

Eugene Goossens' Oboe Concerto (1927) is on Oboe Classics CC2031, performed by Léon Goossens.



Anthony Robb studied flute at the Guildhall School of Music with Peter Lloyd and Edward Beckett, and on leaving was appointed principal flute with the BBC Radio Orchestra at the age of 23.

Described by the Times as "a glorious individual player", his career has ranged from playing principal flute in all of London's Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, to solo performances with the Hallé, BBC Concert Orchestra, Sinfonia 21 and the Academy of St Martins in the Fields among others. He has performed concertos by Mozart, Bach, Telemann, Malcolm Arnold, Howard Blake, John Rutter and Vivaldi.

In the commercial world Anthony has been involved in recording soundtracks for many films and television programmes, as well as playing for West End shows.

As a chamber musician Anthony has worked with groups such as London Winds, The St Magnus Trio and the London Symphony Chamber Ensemble. With Jeremy Polmear he has recorded four CDs of chamber music on the Oboe Classics and Ambache labels, including 'Liberté, Egalité, Sororité' (AMB2606), of which the Gramophone commented "*Scènes de la forêt* [by Mel Bonis] is really a work for flute and two accompanists rather than a unified trio, and Anthony Robb shines in it, as indeed he also does in Tailleferre's Concertino."

Jeremy Polmear, described by the Gramophone as "a sympathetic, musicianly artist" is the founder of Oboe Classics, and has played on six of its 35 main titles. With the pianist Diana Ambache he has given recitals at the Wigmore Hall and Purcell Room in London; and in 33 countries on five continents, including programmes of Words and Music in the Gulf with Billie Whitelaw, in Australia with Susannah York and around the UK with Jenny Agutter. They have also given courses for Business Schools, using the Arts as a management training tool.

Jeremy has played with a number of London's chamber and ballet orchestras, including the London Mozart Players and the City of London Sinfonia.

His interest in English and French music is long-standing: he has recorded a CD of Vaughan Williams, Rubbra, Britten, Arnold, Bowen and Dring on the Unicorn-Kanchana label ('Sweet Melancholy', DKPC9121) and Jean Françaix on his own label ('Très Français', Oboe Classics CC2020). He has also made the première recording of Jean-Michel Damase's Trio with horn ('Music for oboe, horn and piano', Oboe Classics CC2022). Of his recording of Claude Arrieu's Trio d'anches ('Liberté, Egalité, Sororité', AMB2606), the Guardian commented that it "could not be any more French if it were shrugging at you over a pastis."

Michael Bell is described by the Gramophone as having a "thoughtful brand of virtuosity". He studied at the Royal Northern College of Music with Derryck Wyndham and Sulamita Aronovsky, and received the Chopin Fellowship award from the Polish Government, enabling further study at the State Academy of Music in Warsaw. Subsequent prizes in national and international competitions led to numerous live concert performances and broadcasts on radio and TV throughout Europe, Australia and Africa.

Michael has recorded solo works by Haydn, Grieg, Janacek and Tchaikovsky, and four CDs of British music with clarinettist Victoria Samek including Joseph Horovitz and the complete duo works for clarinet and piano by Richard Rodney Bennett on the Clarinet Classics label. The Italian label Sheva has issued a recording of Granados and de Falla alongside a new cycle of Alhambra-influenced piano pieces by Peter Seabourne; he is also in demand as a Lieder recitalist.

Michael Bell has over 30 Concertos in his repertoire, including performances of the complete cycle of Beethoven Concertos. Of a performance of Maurice Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand, The Guardian commented "…his performance was a brilliant technical achievement - but more than that a convincing characterisation."