

CD REVIEWS

Rutland Boughton (1878–1960)

The chamber music 'for Joyance'

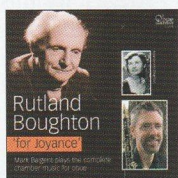
Mark Baigent, oboe

with Eva Cabellero, flute

Michael Jones, piano Sophie Barber, violin

Chian Lim, viola Stephen Orton, cello

Oboe Classics CC2034



As this recording so richly reveals, Rutland Boughton was by any standards an important composer for the oboe. Made famous by his hugely successful opera, *The Immortal Hour* (1914), Boughton made a significant contribution to English music through

his arts festivals at Glastonbury between 1914 and 1926, although his music declined in popularity during his lifetime. It is only in recent years that this composer has achieved the recognition he deserves and not least through his fine compositions for the oboe.

In addition to his two concertos for the instrument (1937 and 1943), the works presented here comprise two oboe quartets, two other works for oboe and string trio, two pieces for oboe and piano and a trio for flute, oboe and piano. Boughton's muse for this outpouring of invention was his daughter, the distinguished oboist Christina Joyance (Joy) Boughton (1913–1963), who was in addition the dedicatee of Benjamin Britten's great solo oboe work, *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*. But the influence of Joy Boughton's teacher, Léon Goossens, seems near at hand when we consider that these works were written during the great years of Goossens' prime, and alongside the oboe chamber works of Arnold Bax, Arthur Bliss, Elizabeth Maconchy, E.J. Moeran and Benjamin Britten himself. Boughton joins this group as a major contributor to the genre.

Of the two oboe quartets, No.2 is the more significant and rightly occupies prime position on this disc. Beginning with a deceptively pastoral theme in its first movement, the music is rhapsodic and brilliant, with virtuoso writing for the oboe and string trio, realised here with energy and flair. The slow movement is a gem, containing music of touching simplicity and grace. This is a quartet of stature and one that deserves much more attention than it has enjoyed in the past.

In *Two Pieces for Oboe and Piano* (1937), the natural world is never far away with a lovely combination of folksong and birdsong in *Somerset Pastorale*, and a feeling of the shepherd pipe introducing the lively folk dance that follows in *The passing of the Faerie*, both played with charm and affection by oboist and pianist. The *Three Songs without Words* (1937) for oboe and string trio are no less colourful, containing some of the most inventive music on

this disc with poetic inspiration from Housman, Mary Webb and Eimar O'Duffy.

Portrait for flute, oboe and piano dates from 1925 and is a single movement work which juxtaposes sections of gorgeous sonority with faster and more dramatic music, all played on this disc with excellent chamber music rapport. Here we have music of a more continental flavour with Boughton clearly exploring new ground and seemingly drawing influence from the French Impressionists.

A setting of *Greensleeves* for oboe and string trio forms a charming introduction to Boughton's *Oboe Quartet No.1* that ends this recital. Also drawing on folk song and folk dance idioms, the earlier quartet has a lighter feel to it than its later counterpart, but nonetheless is full of character and English pastoral idiom. Written 'for my daughter, Joy', it is easy to picture the twenty-one year old oboist, playing this work at the outset of her distinguished career and as the daughter of such a talented composer, an artistic relationship that produced rich musical results.

Mark Baigent must be congratulated on this fascinating recording. Playing on a 1901 Lorée oboe similar to Goossens' treasured instrument and akin to the English Louis instrument that Joy Boughton played, Baigent captures the musical character of Boughton's music perfectly, playing with a beautiful sound and many insightful nuances. There is humour and charm throughout, reflected in fine playing from all the artists here recorded. Pianist Michael Jones, himself an established scholar of twentieth-century English music, plays on a 1900 Bösendorfer, whilst flautist Eva Cabellero plays sensitively on a Rudall, Carte & Co. wooden flute of 1930. The string trio (Sophie Barber, Chian Lim and Stephen Orton) play with style and panache, and provide a rich tonal range in eloquent performances of the oboe quartets.

George Caird