

Loved Ones, Neglected Ones

Mark Baigent recounts his experience recording premières by Rutland Boughton on a Lorée oboe from 1901.

The early twentieth century saw a renaissance of the oboe as a chamber instrument, inspired firstly by the playing of Europe's premier oboist Léon Goossens and subsequently by his pupils, many of whom encouraged and commissioned a further raft of pieces for the instrument. One of them, Joy Boughton, is of particular interest; she had a substantial body of works written for her by her father Rutland Boughton that can be heard in a new CD released by the Rutland Boughton Music Trust on the Oboe Classics label.

This recording gives a complete overview of Rutland's works for oboe and includes a number of première recordings. Little known and seldom played, this repertoire hasn't had the exposure it certainly deserves. It was a great treat to discover this composer and to be involved in recording and performing works that were barely on my radar, including his wonderfully unique arrangement of *Greensleeves*, which gets its first public airing on the CD.



Joy Boughton was a leading oboist on the twentieth-century British music scene and a founder member of Britten's Aldeburgh Festival Orchestra. It was her for whom Britten wrote and dedicated his *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, one of the most well-known twentieth-century works for oboe. Along with many oboists I had no idea who the work was dedicated to even though I must have opened my copy numerous times over



Photo: Mark Baigent

Mark Baigent

the years. Although no longer a household name, her recording of the *Six Metamorphoses* on an Oboe Classics CD attests to her great skill as a player.

Her father was one of the foremost British composers in the early twentieth century, corroborated by the record-breaking number of performances to this day of his opera *The Immortal Hour*, for which he was offered an OBE (although he turned it down).

Apart from composing, Rutland Boughton's dream was to set up a house for English opera in Glastonbury on a par with Bayreuth. With the backing of all the big names in British music of the day, including Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir Henry Wood and Sir Edward Elgar, he was about to commence work on it when the First World War broke out and his plans were shelved, never to be realised. During the war he set up the Glastonbury Festivals in which chamber music, opera and orchestral music were performed to an enthusiastic audience for 27 years. After it folded, Rutland Boughton moved to Kilcote in Gloucestershire where the bulk of this repertoire was composed.

Back to the recording, however, and some contextual information! In 2013 I was approached by the Boughton Society to première Rutland Boughton's *Oboe Quartet No.2*, written in 1945. It seemed it had never been performed in

public. (Funnily enough something similar had happened to me some years before, when the Rawsthorne Society approached me to première the *Quartet No.1* of Alan Rawsthorne. This too, it was believed, had not previously been performed.)

So here I was again with the privilege of giving the première of a historical work. Its première was set for 31st August 2014 in Glastonbury as part of a weekend celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Glastonbury Festivals (1914-1926). The event was set up by Ian Boughton, Rutland's grandson and Director of the Rutland Boughton Music Trust.

We performed it in the Assembly Rooms – the original setting for the festival concerts – alongside other works of Rutland and the wonderful quartet by Arnold Cooke. Due to recent flooding it was very humid and musty, causing instant octave box problems, but otherwise the performance went very well. The Boughton quartet turned out to be a substantial work in four movements lasting some 20 minutes at this playing. (Subsequently, I shaved a few minutes off that timing, inspired by recordings of Joy's confident, direct and bold style.) I was bowled over by the quality and inventiveness of the music, and the delegates were thrilled to hear this work played by my group *Charme du Hautbois*, with string players Matthew Truscott, Dorothea Vogel and Becky Truscott.

We gave a number of further performances allowing me the chance to develop my ideas and try some new approaches, only possible once a work becomes better known. I grew more excited as I realised this piece was really something special; wouldn't it be great to record it! However, when Ian approached me with the idea of recording this piece I struggled to decide what to put with it; and how to find the funding. Was there enough music by Boughton to make a whole disc? Ian thought there was but said the Trust's funds were limited. I pondered further. It seemed the basic costs could be covered but it meant finding musicians who were prepared to spend time learning and recording a not inconsiderable amount of music for the pleasure of it! Always a tricky thing when we are all so busy trying to earn a living!

I was sent a large pile of Boughton's works, and then I tentatively approached some colleagues, and a wonderful team was assembled: Sophie Barber violin, Chian Lim viola, Stephen Orton cello, Eva Cabellero flute and Michael Jones piano. It's not surprising in many ways that people jump at the chance to play chamber music, despite a lack of fee (I know I do!), but this was a disc of little and unknown music for oboe, not the Schubert *Octet*! But my willing colleagues were most enthusiastic and encouraging at the idea and I can honestly say that I've never found a bunch of musicians that worked so well together. They were so generous with their time, effort, jokes, enthusiasm and hospitality. So I say a massive thanks to them all!

Having spent my career performing on period oboes I took a long time deliberating whether to record this repertoire on modern or historic instruments. We had premiered the piece using period instruments because that is what I do, but I felt the modern oboe would perhaps be more reliable and dynamic for a CD; however in the end I felt it would add something special to stay historic. I bought my Lorée many years ago to perform English music from the turn of the twentieth century, inspired by Léon Goossens' playing, which I loved. This era had long interested me, and here was the perfect opportunity to use this oboe again, warts and all! Léon Goossens played a Lorée six years younger than mine and Joy played on a Louis. Joy's instrument is now lost (yes, the idea of using it had crossed my mind), but Louis oboes made between the wars were copies of the Lorée, almost to the name! A little heavier and more strongly built, yet there was no difference in keywork design or fingering.

Although I felt the light tone and flexible sound of the Lorée was preferable, its flat low notes and awkward ring keys would be more of a challenge. And the music it would be playing was far from simple! I began by exploring 46mm staples to try and bring the bottom notes up in pitch. They are notoriously flat on old Lorées, perhaps due to the instruments being made to play at A=438, common in France at the time. This worked to some extent, and stopped the lower notes gurgling so easily; but the new reeds



made a much richer sound than I was used to. Although perhaps more appealing to modern audiences, this was not quite the silvery Goossensesque sound I normally expected the instrument to have. Never mind; I had to have a reliable reed to survive 15 hours of recording, and the richer sounding ones worked better than what was already in my reed box.

Some of the music was already known to me from recordings by Sarah Francis, including the *Three Songs without Words*, the *Somerset Pastorale* and the *Quartet No. 1*. Ian presented me with parts for these, and also a *Piano Trio* with flute, *The Passing of the Faerie* for oboe and piano; and later on in our preparations he forwarded the arrangement of *Greensleeves* for oboe quartet which is held by the Royal College of Music. Again it is not known if this was ever performed beyond perhaps a friends-and-family gathering, so it seemed we had another public première to offer.

Parts were produced and the original manuscripts scrutinised, but unfortunately a few odd things still escaped our attention. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the manuscripts sometimes contained revisions by both Rutland and Joy.

The day before the recording we got together to rehearse in the venue: the Woodside Hall in Hitchin on 9th August 2017, where we met Paul Arden Taylor who would record us. An oboist himself, he had spent his career performing on an

S2 Howarth which, although more recent and more heavily built than my 1901 oboe, meant I had a sympathetic ear. A discussion of top note fingerings ensued during torrential downpours, which ominously pounded on the roof, but at this stage I decided to stick with what I knew.

The next day we arrived in blazing sunshine but, during the recording sessions, my oboe decided to fill with water and the 2nd octave failed on too many takes! This was a shame as we were trying to keep editing to a minimum in order to capture the spirit of a live performance and gain a better flow to the music. Continued stopping was a nuisance!

After employing packets of cigarette papers and a mop, which got so wet I wondered if it was making things worse, the problems were overcome. Apart from that there was only minimal further disruption (mostly from council lawn mowers), which was amazing for a venue in a town so near to Luton airport.

Using period instruments meant that I wanted to imbue the music with some period style too. I listened to Joy playing the *Metamorphoses* and heard her firm non-sentimental approach, which led me to take brisker tempos (particularly on the second quartet) than I had first imagined. I also listened to old recordings of string playing, and asked my players to add *portamenti* where they could. It was such an important, expressive and heavily used addition to string technique at that time and I loved the added emotional content it gave to the performance.

Sophie fitted gut strings on her violin, and Eva used a lovely wooden flute from the 1930s, which instantly sounds very different: a wonderfully woody and breathy sound that is absent on the metal flute. Ian was also insistent that, as well as being authentic, we must be ourselves; but I wanted to try and get a more delicate quality to the music, a characteristic that I feel is lost with a lot of modern performances and the big sounds that we are expected to make nowadays. I think we achieved that.

After the recording I spent time marking up corrections and revisions to the scores and parts we used from the Boughton

Music Trust, so that I hope they are now correct. Looking at the original manuscripts showed us that Rutland Boughton was often a very messy composer, with scribbles and crossings out all over the place. He made revisions from score to parts and then Joy made further revisions. My idea that a score is sacred has been revised, certainly with regard to Boughton! He seemed to take on board what Joy suggested allowing her to make changes she deemed better. She frequently didn't play what was marked!

So it has been hard deciding what is correct. Do you play what Boughton first imagined, or do you play as he subsequently revised, or do you play his daughter's ensuing amendments, whether Rutland approved them or did not?

In the end perhaps it is always best to take the composer's last ideas and then maybe adjust the odd thing ourselves if we feel that, for example, a slur doesn't work for us after all. Certainly Joy's changes made for much better music in the end, and so here we have a wonderful synthesis of composer and player working together – father and daughter – whose music and inspiration produced what to my ear is a wonderful library of works.

Somerset Pastorale and *The Passing of the Faerie* for oboe and piano are published by Seresta Music (albeit with a few errors in their original versions before they were revised and combined into one work); they also publish an arrangement by David Ashbridge of *Greensleeves* for oboe and piano.

For all the other music, enquire at www.therutlandboughtonmusictrust.org.uk
The CD *Rutland Boughton 'for Joyance'* is available from www.oboeconcertos.com

