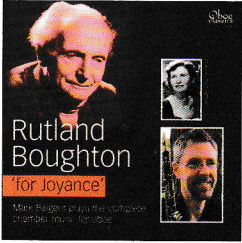




## OBOE RECORDING REVIEWS

Review by **Jeanne Marie Belfy** | Boise, Idaho



### **Rutland Boughton 'for Joyance'**

**Mark Baigent**, oboe; Eva Cabellero, flute;  
Michael Jones, piano; Sophie Barber, violin;  
Chian Lim, viola; Stephen Orton, cello  
Oboe Classics 2034, 2017.

Oboe Classics label offers this compilation of Rutland Boughton's six chamber works with oboe, half of which have never before been recorded for publication. The six include two multi-movement oboe quartets, a set of three character pieces and a single-movement artistic folk-song arrangement for the same instrumentation; a two-movement trio for flute, oboe, and piano; and a set of two character pieces for oboe and piano. Rutland Boughton was the father of oboist **Joy Boughton** (1913–1963). Chamber music was not his primary interest; he wrote dozens of operatic works modeled on his concept of the English music-drama—usually with large choral parts—and a long list of other orchestral and choral works. His affinity for Wagner is ubiquitous in writings about him, along with his insistence on sharing his Socialist political views, and a tendency to indulge in romantic relationships with a succession of women. Though it is claimed he offended many, including his own patrons, he left a large legacy of music that is defended and promoted by his surviving children and grandchildren. In 1978, the Rutland Boughton Music Trust was established. Its website is not functioning at this writing, but its stated aim is to “promote Rutland Boughton by encouraging performances and sponsoring recordings of his music.”

Joy (Christina Joyance) Boughton studied with **León Goossens** at the RCM and was a contemporary of **Evelyn Rothwell**. **Sarah Francis** wrote about her in 1994 in the IDRS Journal, explaining that she became the oboist in the Sylvan Trio, along with Sarah's father, flutist John Francis, and mother, pianist Millicent Silver. They helped create the English Opera Group, an orchestra that performed for Benjamin Britten's Aldeburgh Festival, beginning in 1948. In this context, Britten decided to write an unaccompanied solo

work for Joy Boughton, his *Six Metamorphoses*. Describing her memories of Boughton's playing, Sarah Francis says:

She had a lovely well-focused tone which you had to listen to. Every phrase had meaning. It was sincere playing, warm but not sentimental. She had a phenomenal technique, and I don't just mean running about: it was her control over the instrument. She didn't use too much vibrato.

[Sarah Francis, "Joy Boughton: A Portrait Compiled by Sarah Francis." *The Double Reed* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1994): 66.]

Oboist **Mark Baigent** brings all of this to his performances on the Boughton compilation CD, sponsored by the Rutland Boughton Music Trust. And he does it with a 1901 Lorée oboe, T97 (Joy Boughton had Louis & Co. Lorée knock-off, but Baigent says it was similar to Goosens's 1907 Lorée, the same model as the oboe on this recording). Piling on the sonic authenticity, historic flute specialist Eva Caballero plays a wooden Rudall, Carte & Co., the piano is a 1900 Bösendorfer, and the string players all use synthetic core or gut strings. This extra effort pays off through lovely, light, flexible expression, lending extra charm to Boughton's busy, hyper-dramatic gestures.

Much of the composer's talent lays, music-drama notwithstanding, in imitating and spinning soulful British folk song and dance styles, the ubiquitous pastorale and the lyric nostalgia so prevalent during his time. Rutland Boughton's musical ideations have taken root and found places in my own heart through repeated listening. The *Oboe Quartet No. 2* of 1945 opens the CD, and was only recently known to audiences through Mark Baigent's 2014 Glastonbury Festival centenary celebration (likely) premiere performance. The event must have been the catalyst for the expansion of Baigent's participation in this entire project. Dedicated "For my daughter, Joy," the four expansive movements total nearly 18 minutes. The strings are used as imaginative counterparts to the oboe's thematic materials. Progressive harmonies find their place beside bucolic tunes, catchy syncopes, and jaunty articulations. The writing is clever and solid, though in the first movement, it vacillates between a catchy, folk-style theme and patches of virtuosic, modulating sequences with developmental aspirations. Boughton's absorption in what we used to call post-romantic chromaticism is obvious and really quite fun in this spare medium. The second quartet's second movement, according to Ian Boughton's liner notes, is a new version of the third movement, "Barcarolle," from his 1937 *Three Songs without Words* for oboe quartet. These alternate versions (both on the CD) seem mostly similar, built on an atmospheric, tonally ambiguous theme that resolves to a sweet G major tonic. The lightly skipping, third-movement scherzo contains delightful Brahmsian hemiolas and one fiendishly

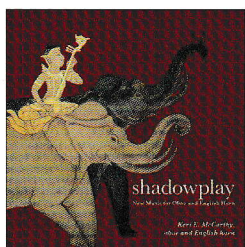
difficult-sounding lick, repeated at two levels, for the oboe. The final movement satisfies with strong counterpoint, clever motives, large-scale architecture, and characteristic triumphant conclusion—achieved within a brief four minutes.

To hear Mark Baigent send the warm, silky timbre of his 110-year-old Lorée through the poetically expressive “Somerset Pastorale” and “The Passing of the Faerie” from *Two Pieces for Oboe and Piano* is inspirational for both players and listeners. Boughton’s settings are every bit as moving as any British composer’s of his time, with imaginative flourishes for both instruments that take them beyond the text and into the sounds of nature. Baigent’s articulations and trills carry just the right balance of deliberation and whimsy. He presents the non-stop repetitions in the second piece with deceptive ease.

With as much time Rutland Boughton spent composing, promoting, and organizing performances of his stage works, it stands to reason that some of that music would be recycled into character pieces for his beloved oboist daughter. The *Three Songs without Words* for oboe quartet demonstrate this conscious distinction between polished arrangements of music previously used for song and the formally-developed, multi-movement oboe quartets 1 and 2. The first Song, “Whence!”, comes from a 1935 lost opera, and the following two *Songs* refer to contemporary poems, English and Irish, that were meaningful to Boughton. “Faery-Flout” rips through a busy texture, racing to its quiet end, and the haunting “Barcarolle” follows. The *Portrait for Flute, Oboe and Piano* may have been written for León Goossens (in 1925), but it makes sense as a piece for the Sylvan Trio would have used on their many performances, more than a decade later. Boughton called it a “Character Study”; the character takes nine minutes to develop. Though all three players give deliciously smooth, sensitive ensemble playing, and Eva Caballero’s wooden flute is a particularly tasteful component, this piece needs more hearings than the others for the ear to sort it out. Both the parallel unisons and voicings in close harmony between the two woodwinds are masterfully tuned. The piece wanders, albeit into some dazzling chambers.

Little seems to be known about the circumstances of Boughton’s *Greensleeves* arrangement for oboe quartet, except that it was composed sometime during the second world war. The two-minute piece contains variety through inventive counterpoint and some non-traditional harmonization, and it is well put together. It makes a nice prelude to the CD’s final offering, Boughton’s *Oboe Quartet No. 1*. In contrast to the second oboe quartet, this 1932 work was played often by its dedicatee. Joy Boughton also undertook some revisions, giving herself a solo cadenza in the last movement. The first movement dances during the allegretto first theme for the oboe. The string writing is subtle, often providing a clearly differentiated backdrop; Baigent’s period partners make a good case for the older-style strings. The short second movement, marked *Allegro giocoso*, lives

up to its buoyant marking through cantering melodies traded between oboe and violin. The third movement is nearly eight minutes long: there is the little cadenza section; the violent, dramatic double-dotted gestures; and the poignant final minute or so of resolution. This might not be the strongest ending for the CD, but wisely, the best works, in my opinion, are offered first. We can enjoy the expansion of mid-20th-century repertoire by both listening to and playing these well-written works from a truly original compositional voice. We can be grateful he also produced a daughter who played a major role in inspiring the compositions. Finally, we can rejoice in the sincere labors of those who made this project succeed, especially an oboist who has specialized in performing with consummate musicianship on older instruments.



### **Shadowplay: New Music for Oboe and English Horn**

**Keri E. McCarthy**, oboe and English horn; Jeffery Savage, piano; Karen Savage, piano; **Michael Garza**, bassoon; Lark Powers, piano; David Jarvis and Brent Edwards, percussion; Ruth Boden, cello; Meredith Arksey, violin.

Washington State University WSU Recordings 2017-2.

**Keri McCarthy's** debut CD represents over ten years of thoughtful musical preparation with ties to Southeast Asia. She had served for a full year as an associate professor at Mahidol University College of Music in Thailand before coming to Washington State University as oboe professor. Her contacts with musicians across Southeast Asia and China led to extensive collaborations, and a platform for launching her themed recording project. She does everything from promoting and performing Asian music for oboe through her Pan Pacific Ensemble to engineering philanthropic efforts to provide double reed instruments and lessons to schools in Myanmar and beyond, along with her colleague, bassoonist **Michael Garza**—a service project known as Light through Music. About seven years ago she was selected for a Fulbright grant to work in Bangkok, where she studied Thai music and both commissioned and performed works by composers throughout Southeast Asia. *Shadowplay: New Music for Oboe and English Horn*, is a remarkable testament to her engagement with global colleagues, and a beautiful collection of expertly performed music for oboe and various other instruments.

The CD contains works by Southeast Asian composers and contemporary Western composers. Four of the compositions have thematic connections with non-Western music, and three do not. The various styles work well together and provide a satisfying experience in the order presented. One of my favorites opens the CD in four movements