

Oboe Archive

UK: Janet Craxton (1929-81)

A collection of tapes and discs has been discovered in the Craxton family archives. They include a ground-breaking performance of the Vaughan Williams Concerto on 78 rpm discs. The tapes contain off-air recordings by Janet Craxton, often with her husband the composer Alan Richardson (1904-78) on piano, and are included with thanks to the BBC. They have been digitally cleaned and enhanced by Malcolm McMillan.



- 1-3 Ralph Vaughan Williams, Concerto for oboe and strings
with the Hallé Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli
Rondo pastorale - Minuet and Musette - Finale [Scherzo]

These are Acetates (short-run 78rpm discs) of a BBC studio performance of 11th April 1952, where Janet Craxton had been Principal Oboe since 1949. The discs had to be cleaned of fungus and some surface noise is still evident, but the interpretation soars. In a note from 1969 Ursula Vaughan Williams, congratulating Janet on a later performance, said "it was lovely to hear the oboe concerto - I always feel as if Ralph had invented a new sort of bird."

- 4-6 Lennox Berkeley, Sonatina. With Alan Richardson (piano)
Molto moderato - Andante - Allegro

This Sonatina was written in 1962 and dedicated to Janet and John (her painter brother) Craxton. The recording date is not known, but it is described as the first broadcast performance. In a note from 1964 Berkeley writes to Janet of the Sonatina: "I'm so glad you 'went out on a limb' to do it because I like it better than most of the things I've done recently."

- 7 Darius Milhaud, Suite d'Après Corrette, Op. 161b (1938)
Janet Craxton (oboe), Colin Bradbury (clarinet), Geoffrey Gambold (bassoon)
*Entrée et Rondeau - Tambourin - Musette - Sérénade -
Fanfare - Rondeau - Menuet - Le Coucou*

This performance is from a live concert. The other players were Principals in the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which suggests that this is from Janet's time there (1954 to 1963).

- 8-9 Alan Richardson, Sonatina, Op. 51(1965)
with Alan Richardson (piano)
Allegro moderato - Lento and Molto vivace

Janet Craxton and Alan Richardson were married from 1962 until his death in 1979. They regularly performed together.

- 10-12 Francis Poulenc, Sonata (1962)
with Alan Richardson (piano)
Élégie - Scherzo - Déploration

Oboists will spot a missing bar in the first movement (possibly intentional) and three in the second (problems with the tape); there is also some radio interference near the start of the third. However, in this fascinating performance (described as the first broadcast in the UK) Janet gives an unaffected interpretation, reminding us that she studied with Pierre Bajeux at the Paris Conservatoire from 1948-9 and also later commissioned the cor anglais *Quatuor* from Jean Françaix.

