



# Clarinet & Saxophone

Autumn 2017 Volume 42, No 3



**ClarinetFest 2017**

ALL THE HIGHLIGHTS

**Mozart & Stadler**

A TRUE PARTNERSHIP

**YOLANDA BROWN**

Love, politics and the saxophone



## Regulars

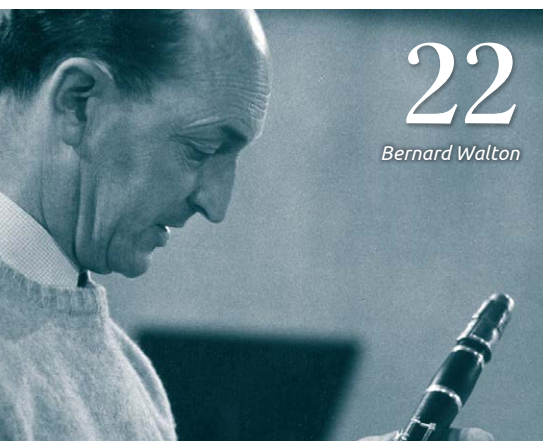
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PHOTO: AGENDA



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Travelling with a sax

# A fresh

*YolanDa Brown is gaining recognition as one of the UK's most joyful and creative saxophonists.*

*Her latest album, Love Politics War, fuses elements of reggae, jazz and soul into a new sub-genre she calls 'posh reggae'.*

*Michael Pearce meets her*

There is little about YolanDa Brown's story that conforms to the status quo. Born in Barking, east London, her relationship with the saxophone has always been a deeply personal affair: a constant voyage of exploration and self-discovery never aimed at a career in music.

After initially trying the piano, violin and drums, Brown first discovered the saxophone aged 13, when the lack of a spare oboe at her school led her to try an alternative wind instrument. She recalls, 'I remember getting the saxophone over a Christmas holiday before starting in January. I just loved finding the instrument for myself, building it up, learning how the reed works and just finding a sound. I loved the soulfulness of it, the resonance through your body, it was just a different experience.'

When it came to lessons, however, an overemphasis on theory and exams left Brown increasingly frustrated and stifled, so she quickly decided to go rogue and teach herself. She explains, 'Of course I did miss the teaching support, but I think I did have that wonderful experience of learning the instrument for myself. I do a lot in music education now where I go into schools, and I do think it's very important to have that musical support, basis of lessons and theoretical knowledge, but at the same time, there is a method of discovery which every musician should go through, where they just close the book, improvise for themselves and find out what their natural tone and tempo really is. Expression is as important as the education.'

PHOTO: AGENDA





# BERNARD WALTON

*2017 marks the centenary of the birth of clarinettist Bernard Walton, a name now vaguely remembered at best. Fellow clarinettist and Walton's pupil Murray Khouri makes the case for reviving his legacy*

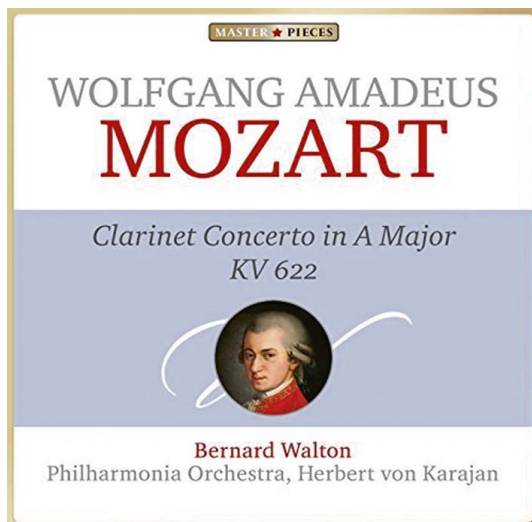
The clarinettist Bernard Walton, who was born 100 years ago, is a name familiar only to his ex-students and a handful of musical connoisseurs. He was one of the few British wind players who, through their individual sound and style, became world famous. Names like the oboist Leon Goossens and horn player Dennis Brain produced sounds which were instantly recognisable, similar to great violinists such as Jascha Heifetz.

Walton was my teacher from the day I arrived in London, and I went on to play next to him in the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He came from a musical family that produced trumpet player Bob and double bassist John. The young Bernard was only 19 when Beecham invited him to join the London Philharmonic as principal clarinet. This untroubled beginning was put swiftly to rest with the advent of World War Two.

Many of London's best players ended up in one or other of the military bands, and Walton arrived into the band of the Irish Guards, destined to rot there for seven long years. He was still there well after the war ended, missing out on the explosion of opportunities created by the public's appetite for music that was denied them during the war. After protracted negotiation by his family, he was finally released in the late 1940s to enter the freelance market and could be heard in pick-up orchestras like the National Symphony under Sydney Beer.

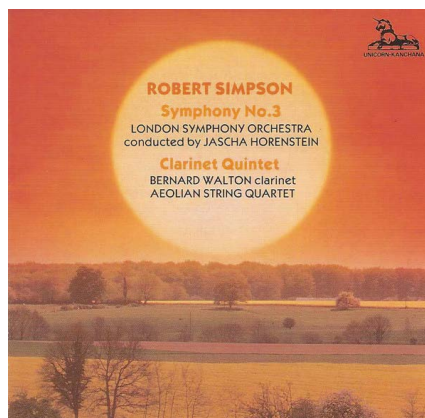
He was well known to Walter Legge, chief producer at EMI and founder of the Philharmonia Orchestra. Legge's original first clarinet was the famous Reginald Kell who soon emigrated to the USA. Frederick Thurston, a distinguished principal in the pre-war BBC Symphony, took his place but was soon struck down by lung cancer. In the early 1950s, Walton was employed as a cover for Thurston whose health was

In today's playing of breathtaking conformity, players like Walton shine out, representative of an era when personality coupled with expressiveness ruled the day



*Above: One of few Walton solo performances that can be found on Spotify*

*Right: Walton's recording of the Robert Simpson Clarinet Quintet*



quickly fading. Legge promised Walton that upon Thurston's death, Walton would take his place.

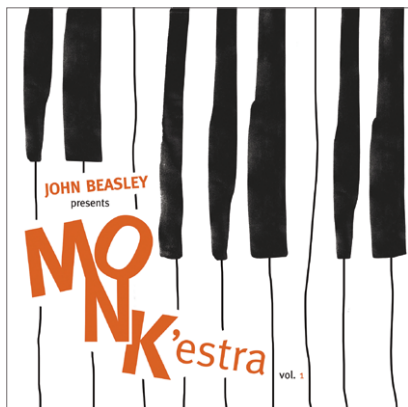
Thurston died in late 1953 and Legge was good to his word. On Karajan's recording of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony you can hear Thurston on side 1 and Walton on side 2. There then followed a decade of distinguished achievement, with Walton joining a wind section unrivalled with the exception of Beecham's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

A digression is necessary at this point, for a crisis came in Walton's playing. He had always used fairly solid reeds on a

# CD

## CD REVIEWS

### Clarinet & Saxophone



#### MONK'ESTRA VOL 1

John Beasley Orchestra  
Mack Avenue

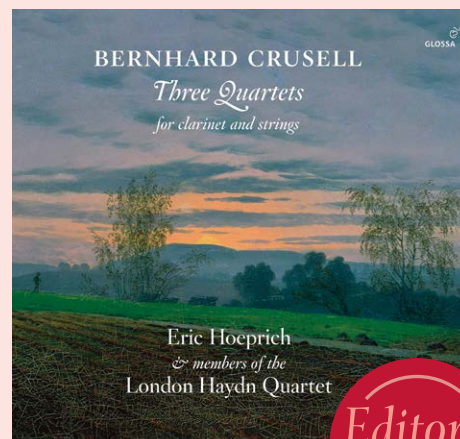
Clive Davis, jazz critic for the *London Times*, posted a review of John Beasley's Modern Jazz Orchestra July 2017 appearance at Ronnie Scott's Club. In it, he waxed lyrically about this US pianist-arranger's big band chart work devoted to Thelonious Monk compositions. Mr Davis drew my attention to the leader employing a brace of bass clarinets, so I

hastened to Amazon to become more familiar with what constituted such a glowing review.

I have to admit that after auditioning the first two tracks ('Epistrophy' and 'Skippy') of this 55-minute CD, produced in 2016, my spirits sank. This was on account of what I considered to be too much contrapuntal activity between brass, reeds, guest soloists and percussion, plus the same within some of the sections. This, coupled with Monk's distinctly advanced themes, intervals and harmonies, gave me the initial impression of musical chaos. But on moving through the remaining eight tracks (why does everyone call them 'songs'?) my appreciation of Beasley's writing skills changed. The raw material is quite brilliant – Monk's originality enhanced with the sonorities of Ellington, New Orleans Street Beat, the Mingus Big Band and Basie, plus a generous helping of Beasley's very own instrumental groupings. Unfortunately the documentation provided with the CD fails to detail instrumental line-ups – probably because individual tracks were cut on different days with different sessioneers. At times it sounds as if a 16-18 piece might be in play.

Returning to the content: 'Epistrophy' features Garry Burton, a guesting vibraphonist; 'Skippy' carries solos by Bob Sheppard, an LA sessioneer on alto/soprano saxes; 'OSKA-T' is a trumpet/trombone feature with Monk's voice in the background; 'Round About Midnite' is a splendid arrangement with Beasley on piano; 'Ask Me Now' is a harmonica solo and another great arrangement; 'Gallop's Gallop' is a gentle swing number; 'Little Rootie Tootie' features Tom Luer and Danny Janklow on tenor/alto respectively, delivering great post-Coltrane style solos; and 'Coming on the Hudson' is a Basie-type chart. Throughout the entire CD odd instrumental combinations appear, for example the bass clarinets and the occasional flute, but overall it's the arrangements that star: novel, exciting and – to pinch a word from Clive Davis – intoxicating. While not exactly rich in saxophone artistry, this one is a must for anyone involved in creative arranging for jazz bands.

Kenneth Morris



#### BERNHARD CRUSELL: THREE QUARTETS FOR CLARINET AND STRINGS

Erich Hoeprich and members of  
the London Haydn Quartet  
Glossa

Crusell's three quartets for clarinet and strings were written over a period of 11 years. All three are presented here in reverse order, beginning with the later Op 7 in D. From the very opening, this performance has a fresh quality, a very clear sound and neat ensemble. The three members of the London Haydn Quartet set up a warm texture from which Hoeprich effortlessly emerges. Op 4 in C minor is dramatic but with a beautiful slow movement, while the lighter Op 2 in E flat ends the recording brilliantly with its youthful vitality.

Much of the clarity comes from the period instruments that Hoeprich and members of the London Haydn Quartet use. Hoeprich's instruments are copies of Crusell's ten-key instrument by Grenser. Fast passagework is executed neatly, but the ear picks up on the cross fingerings on some changes and the subtle tone colours between notes. High notes have their own character, cutting through the texture but far from shrill, while the vocal characteristics come across well in the well-balanced ensemble. The string trio uses gut strings, and the overall effect is light and lucid. The range of colours is impressive, and the contrast in character between the three quartets is enough to justify the three works being together on one disc, as has been shown many times before.

Informative programme notes on Crusell's life and work, and on the development of the instruments, are written by Hoeprich. A fine recording; recommended.

Stephanie Reeve