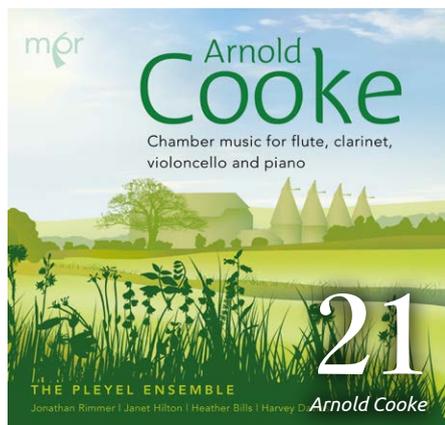


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Timothy McAllister



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BBC Young Jazz Musician final features two sax players

Two saxophonists reached the final of this year's BBC Young Jazz Musician competition. Matt Carmichael (22, Glasgow) and Alex Clarke (20, Cheshire) each presented a 15-minute set with a house band at London's Cadogan Hall, alongside three other finalists. Each set included at least one piece composed or arranged by the finalist.

Pianist Deschanel Gordon (21, London) was named overall winner of the biennial competition. CASSGB sends our congratulations to Deschanel, Alex, Matt and the other finalists. No audience could attend due to lockdown but the event was broadcast on BBC Four.



PHOTO: MIKE WILKINSON
Matt Carmichael



Alex Clarke



150-foot clarinet gets a tune up

25 years since its creation, a 150-foot clarinet on the side of the Holiday Inn in New Orleans has received a much-needed 'service'. The eye-catching painting was created by Robert Dafford, an internationally acclaimed mural artist and blues enthusiast, based on the clarinet owned by Sidney Bechet.

When painting the mural, Dafford held a small silver spoon in his hand to mirror the city behind him so he could paint the reflection on the keywork of the instrument.

Arthur Bliss Clarinet Quintet at Wigmore Hall

The final single-reed concert of Wigmore Hall's autumn season took place in late November with a rare airing of Arthur Bliss's Clarinet Quintet, performed by Robert Plane and the Elias String Quartet. The work was premiered in 1932 by Frederick Thurston and the Kutcher Quartet, and was written as a memorial to the composer's clarinetist brother who was killed during the First World War.

You can watch the performance for free until Christmas Eve on Wigmore Hall's YouTube channel. If you've enjoyed the free concerts in Wigmore Hall's autumn season, you can support future activities by donating to the audience fund (<https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/support-us/wigmore-hall-audience-fund>).

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If you're reading this and you're not a member of CASSGB – or you have a friend or student who should be – join today and you can select a free piece of clarinet and saxophone music from a selection of ten titles from Universal Edition. Find out more at www.cassgb.org – and special thanks to our friends at Universal Edition for kindly supplying the music.

Clarinet & Saxophone
SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

'We have this little saying in our class – can't stop, won't stop,' says Timothy McAllister. 'It just feels so dark at the moment, but all we can continue to do is hone our skills. This is what we trained to do – we're not interested in pivoting.'

I'm Zooming the American saxophonist on a Tuesday morning, the only weekday gap in his busy teaching schedule at the University of Michigan. Wearing large over-ear headphones he joins the call from his home teaching studio, with a soprano sax on a stand to his right and baritone in the corner behind.

I immediately comment on the clarity of his camera, leading our conversation straight to the Covid-19 pandemic. 'It's the very least I can do,' he says. 'I can't necessarily control my students' budget to have a reciprocal set-up, but I need to try and offer them a good experience. And that's hard, it's hard for all of us.'

McAllister has been professor of saxophone at the University of Michigan since 2014, succeeding his former teacher, Donald Sinta. He has a large class by most music college or university standards, responsible for teaching 23 students and coaching five saxophone quartets.

When the first round of lockdown restrictions hit the US in March, the country's entire academic community had one weekend to move

online. 'Initially, I think we were scared that it would somehow replace all in-person teaching, but I don't think anyone has yet concluded this is the right way to move things forward.'

Fast forward to autumn and the University of Michigan, like many universities and colleges in the US and Europe, is now operating a hybrid model. All teaching, including one-to-one lessons, takes place in large spaces to ensure social distancing, which means that room bookings have to be rotated between all faculties. McAllister decided to split his class in half, with each student alternating between weekly in-person and Zoom lessons.

Understandably, safety is the top priority. When teaching in person, McAllister wears both a face mask and shield, and also sets up an air purifier in the room. He doesn't take his instruments, eliminating their potential exposure to aerosols from others. Lessons last only 40 minutes, as opposed to the usual one hour, to allow for room ventilation in between students. 'It's a pretty intense experience,' he says. 'With such limited contact time, I'm encouraging all my students to treat every lesson as if it were a performance.'

His students can still work, albeit in a socially distanced way, with their dedicated studio pianist, Liz Ames, who also features on McAllister's two most recent recordings: *Notturmo* and *Westland* (the latter a CD of works for saxophone and piano by Andy Scott). 'The students haven't really missed a beat,' he explains. 'They're using this opportunity to make lots of recordings and take part in virtual projects, and many are involved in competitions that have moved online.'

There's another reason to be optimistic. Despite the uncertain future of the US arts sector there has been no drop-off in the number of applicants to join McAllister's class – unsurprising, perhaps, since the University of Michigan is a regular fixture in the league tables of America's top 10 music schools. The school's saxophone class is also regularly cited as number one – a reputation McAllister has maintained from his predecessor, Donald Sinta.

'I do worry about smaller colleges and universities, where maybe they weren't getting a huge applicant pool to begin with,

and then perhaps it wasn't a very elite pool. For some young people who were doubting whether they should be a musician, maybe this has just tipped them towards not doing it. They're going to go a totally different route in their careers and their parents will probably encourage them to do something else.'

McAllister has turned this into a rallying cry for his students: 'We need to understand that if there's anyone left standing, it needs to be us, as dark as that sounds. That is the mandate I've put on my students – you need to be the ones who people look to for future leadership, you need to be the experts, and you need to be the ones really demonstrating the highest level of skill.'

Discovering the greats

Born in 1972, McAllister grew up in a suburb of Houston, Texas, near NASA's Johnson Space Centre, where his mother worked as a software engineer. He was lucky to live in a wealthy school district, populated by the children of astronauts and aerospace engineers, which meant that schools had the money to invest in their award-winning school band programmes.

Band programmes exist throughout the US, but few states

treat it as seriously and competitively as Texas. 'It's very innovative, and there's lots of money put towards it, just as much as sports sometimes,' McAllister says.

Students usually choose an instrument in 6th or 7th Grade (equivalent to Year 7 or 8 in England and Wales) and learn through a weekly programme of sectional and whole-

The students haven't really missed a beat. They're using this opportunity to make lots of recordings and take part in virtual projects, and many are involved in competitions that have moved online

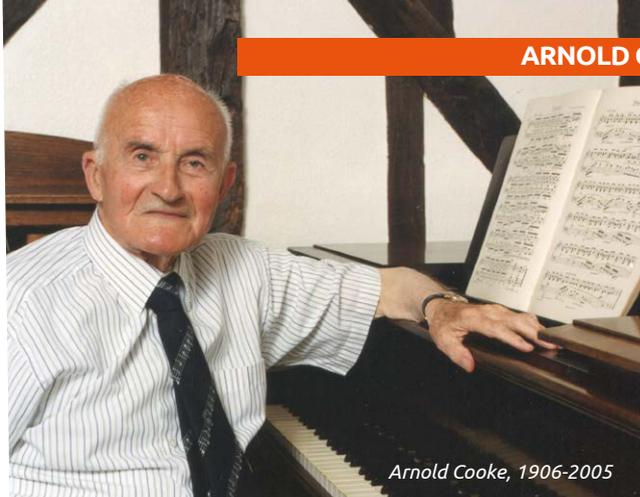


ensemble band rehearsals. In most schools participation is compulsory, at least to begin with, and free of charge – at least in theory.

'From the very beginning, what comes with these kinds of juggernaut school band programmes is essentially a mandatory need to take private lessons. If you want to excel and be in the top band, if you want to be considered for first chair, that's the only way.' Fortunately, McAllister's family could pay for lessons. His mother, a pianist and violist in her youth, always encouraged his musical studies, never pushing him down the science route she followed herself.

So why saxophone? In short – it was the heyday of fusion jazz. 'We were growing up with MTV and seeing saxophone solos in all these music videos. Wham, Spandau Ballet, Bruce Springsteen, Clarence Clemons – it was just part of the culture at the time. We saw David Sanborn every week in the band of the early David Letterman shows, and Lenny Pickett was front and centre of the Saturday Night Live Band. There was just the litany of ➡

The chamber music of ARNOLD COOKE



Arnold Cooke, 1906-2005

CASSGB president Janet Hilton introduces a new recording of chamber works featuring the clarinet by the 20th-century English composer Arnold Cooke

In Arnold Cooke's music one senses a wish that both performers and audience should be able to appreciate the music without difficulties or barriers to understanding and enjoyment.

Cooke expressed his 'particular liking for the clarinet' in a letter to the American clarinetist Stanley Gauke, adding that 'in range, scope, qualities of sound and expressiveness, the clarinet is superior to other wind instruments.'

Many clarinetists will have encountered the music of Arnold Cooke through his Sonata for clarinet and piano in B flat, with its wonderful opening melody that perfectly captures the clarinet's ability to span long angular phrases in legato.

Cooke's chamber music is, however, less familiar. The Pleyel Ensemble, in which I play, has just released a CD of world premiere recordings, including the Trio for clarinet, cello and piano, the Quartet for flute, clarinet, cello and piano, *Alla Marcia* for clarinet and piano, and *Prelude and Dance* for clarinet and piano. The director of the Pleyel Ensemble, pianist Harvey Davies, is staff pianist and fellow in historical performance at the Royal Northern College of Music. He has taken Cooke's chamber music as the subject for his PhD, and this new disc is one of a series of four, produced in association with Mike Purton Recordings.

Arnold Cooke (1906-2005) was born in Gomersal, Yorkshire. He attended Repton School, where he took lessons in cello, piano, organ and composition. In 1926 he went on to study at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he gained a BA in history, but then switched to music and completed a BMus in 1929. His professor of music, Edward J Dent, also a leading critic and writer on music, encouraged Cooke to continue his studies in Berlin, at the Hochschule for performing arts, where in 1927 Paul Hindemith had been appointed professor of composition.

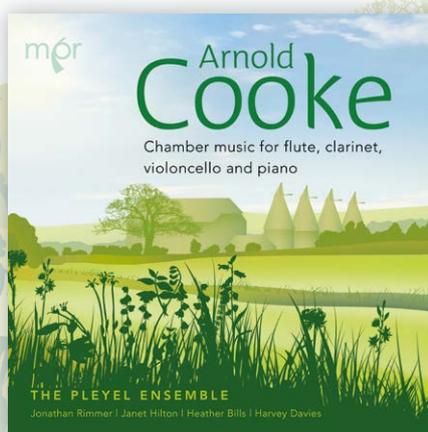
Hindemith was one of the most successful composers in Europe. His influence is felt not only in Cooke's musical style, but also in the philosophy behind 'Gebrauchsmusik' – music that is practical and useful. On his return to England Cooke became director of the Cambridge Festival Theatre, and in 1933 he was appointed a professor of composition at the Royal Manchester College of Music (now the Royal Northern College of Music). During World War II Cooke served in the Royal Navy and in 1945 returned to London to teach at Trinity College of Music.

He composed prolifically and from 1947, when the BBC Symphony Orchestra premiered his first symphony at the Proms, his music enjoyed much success, with numerous BBC broadcasts and Wigmore Hall concerts.

Although I had played the Clarinet Sonata and the *Songs of Innocence* for soprano, clarinet and piano, the Trio for clarinet, cello and piano and the Quartet for flute, clarinet, cello and piano were unknown to me until preparing for the Pleyel Ensemble recording.

The trio was written in 1965, commissioned by the Hilary Robinson Trio, who gave the first performance in 1966 at the Wigmore Hall. The clarinetist was Rachel Herbert. It is a rewarding work to play and perhaps to programme alongside the trios of Beethoven and Brahms. There are four movements. The first, 'Allegro non troppo', has long, lyrical lines of melody, perfectly

The music of Arnold Cooke has been unjustifiably neglected in recent years, overshadowed by more avant-garde composers



balanced between the instruments. The second is a contrasting 'Vivace', with a shifting time signature and rhythmic quirks. Some of Cooke's most beautiful writing is heard in the heartfelt third movement, and the Trio finishes with an energetic 'Allegro assai', including a jazzy fugue.

The Quartet for flute, clarinet, cello and piano was written in 1964 for the Chantry Ensemble, in which the clarinetist was Georgina Dobrée. This combination of instruments is very unusual, but it is effective, the clarinet forming a bridge between the flute and cello. Cooke described Hindemith's Quartet for clarinet, strings and piano (1938) as 'a parallel and admired

model' for this work. There are three movements. The first is dramatic and, on occasion, discordant. The central 'Andante' opens with the clarinet, the mood is one of melancholy and an expressive sadness pervades the movement. The last movement is a very fast tarantella. Harvey Davies, in his programme note, says that 'despite its outward frivolity, the humour is ironic and perhaps a little uncomfortable.' The Quartet is a highly original piece that deserves to be heard more frequently.

The music of Arnold Cooke has been unjustifiably neglected in recent years, overshadowed by more avant-garde composers. Its lyrical style now suits the search for beauty in today's world. ■

Arnold Cooke: Chamber Music for flute, clarinet, cello and piano (MPR 109) is available from www.pleyelensemble.com

Learning BY ear

'Try searching the web for "woodwind lessons for blind and visually impaired children in the UK" and you will find there is a complete lack of facilities and opportunities for such children,' says Tony Rodwell. Rodwell is lead trustee of Yes I Can!, a charity devoted to providing access for blind and visually impaired people (primarily children and young adults) to learn to play a woodwind instrument.

Yes I Can! aims to give this disadvantaged group the opportunity to enjoy all that music entails and, at the same time, help them develop an increased skillset, which can be used socially or professionally. 'Even London's Royal College of Music Junior Department has suspended tuition for all brass and woodwind instruments for blind children, and that was before the pandemic arrived,' says Rodwell.

Rodwell first learned about the lack of opportunities for the blind and visually impaired during a conversation with his lifelong friend, Chris Waters. A talented musician in his own right and a music teacher with more than 30 years' experience, Waters has taught a broad spectrum of pupils, including some who were visually challenged. Waters is also a winner of the prestigious Classic FM UK Peripatetic Music Teacher of the Year award.

Waters told Rodwell that in 2017 there were 26,300 children and young people being supported for visual impairment in England (source: Royal National Institute for the Blind). However, the pair noted that there were only a few very small pockets of lessons offered for those who wanted to join in with mainstream instrumental learning. Save for New College Worcester, an independent boarding and day school for blind or partially sighted students aged 11 to 19, there was nothing open and inviting for these learners, and nothing at all to help primary school children from the age of eight. Rodwell's view is that this is the age at which woodwind instrumental learning can start, which made the lack of provision for younger blind or partially sighted learners all the more pressing.

As a result of their conversations, Rodwell and Waters joined forces to launch Yes I Can! in February 2019. 'I felt that with Chris's passion for teaching and the experience and expertise he could offer,' says Tony, 'combined with my decades of experience in international marketing and PR, which involved travelling globally, we could create an organisation that would fill the current void and make learning an instrument accessible to everyone, irrespective of their challenges.'

He continues: 'However, while everyone who has learned about the charity enthuses about its aims and ambitions, turning those plaudits into hard cash to provide the necessary tools for tuition was to prove an uphill struggle. As a not-for-profit charity providing a much-needed "music emergency service", we need funding to produce the mp3 note-by-note descriptions and separate backing tracks that are part of our "learning music by ear" approach.'

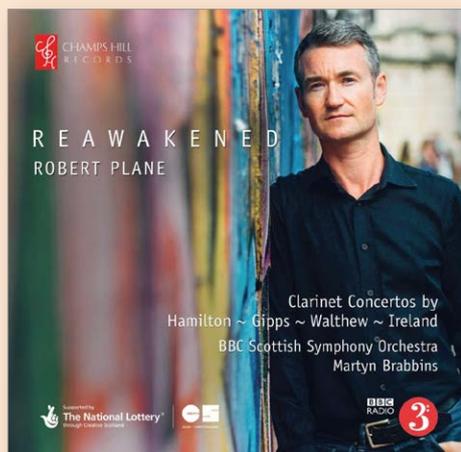
Chris Walters hears from Tony Rodwell and Chris Waters, trustees of the charity Yes I Can!, which helps children with vision impairments learn wind and brass instruments using a system of audio-description notation and play-along backing tracks



For each piece of music, we specify and record individual note names and lengths verbally, along with the associated pitch, bar by bar

Waters takes up the story. 'Braille music is incredibly cumbersome. One note is contained in a half-inch square box of six embossed dots. The Braille notation cell is arranged like an egg carton for six eggs, ie in three rows of two. The top two rows represent pitch while the bottom row is used for rhythm. So you can imagine the length of bars with quavers and semiquavers. A single sheet of normal printed music could well be an inch-thick stack of paper in Braille music.'

Waters describes the charity's 'learning music by ear' approach: 'For each piece of music, we specify and record individual note names and lengths verbally, along with the associated pitch, bar by bar. This varies between one and four bars at a time, depending on how many notes there are per bar, and based on the level of required competence.'



REAWAKENED: CLARINET CONCERTOS BY HAMILTON, GIPPS, WALTHER & IRELAND

Robert Plane (clarinet)

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
Champs Hill Records

Both a passion project and a cutting-edge release, this record is the culmination of painstaking research on the part of the clarinet soloist, Robert Plane, who wrote about the process of unearthing and recording these lost British works for clarinet and orchestra in *Clarinet & Saxophone* earlier this year (spring 2020).

Leading British clarinetists of the first half of the 20th century did a great deal to promote the clarinet as a serious solo instrument, and many composers responded by writing vivid and ambitious works for it. But as the musical establishment turned away from the urbane, pastoral English tradition in the latter half of the century and towards the avant-garde, many of these works fell from favour and into obscurity. Happily, Plane and others are now putting this right.

All three concertos featured here are in the standard three-movement format (fast-slow-fast). Iain Hamilton's Clarinet Concerto is first. This forthright work sets a dramatic tone, and Plane's hearty, generous sound and fluid technique are more than a match for the serious demands of the music. The slow movement is serene and heart-rending, while the outer movements are turbulent and challenging.

Richard Henry Walthew's Concerto, newly orchestrated here, is much frothier, with a nod to English light music but also a through-line to Crusell and other 19th-century clarinet composers with its bubbling arpeggio figures and runs. Plane gives a suitably sparkling performance.

Ruth Gipps' Concerto is next. Its subtle textures repay repeated listening, and its tonal landscape is harmonically wide-ranging and satisfying. It is finely orchestrated, and the melancholy but virtuosic solo cadenza in the first movement is a gift to performer and listener alike. This is a respectful and finessed performance of a fascinating work.

The record closes with John Ireland's *Fantasy Sonata* in a successful new arrangement for clarinet and strings by Graham Parlett. Listeners may know this grand single-movement work in its original version for clarinet and piano, and anyone who has attempted the soft, high opening will be envious of the bed of strings supporting Plane here, instead of the usual non-sustaining piano chords. This piece is a good inclusion – as clarinetists we sometimes forget that even our better known solo works are relatively unfamiliar to non-clarinetists and often deserve wider exposure.

Congratulations to Robert Plane and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra on this beautifully conceived, performed and recorded project. I look forward to future endeavours in a similar vein.

Chris Walters



TIME

Jess Gillam

Decca Classics

Most single-reeders will have followed the progress of Jess Gillam with a certain awe since her breakthrough at the BBC Young Musician competition a few years back. Her initial musical identity was one of fizzing enthusiasm across genres, backed up with all the necessary technical knowhow and a highly communicative style. At the time, she made a significant impact and shifted the 'classical' saxophone into a more prominent place in the public consciousness. Since then, she has branched out into presenting on BBC Radio 3 and elsewhere, though performing is still her primary focus.

Gillam now brings us *Time*, her second album, following on from last year's *Rise*. Both albums are somewhat glossy and targeted at a broad listenership with nothing to frighten the horses, although both are full of sumptuous production and intelligent takes on the chosen musical selections.

The centrepiece of *Time* is Michael Nyman's *Where the Bee Dances*, which Gillam performed at the BBC Young Musician final. The performance here feels like a lap of honour, with both Gillam and the Aurora Orchestra pulling off a stirring rendition.

Elsewhere, the selections are ambient rather than arresting, including two Philip Glass reworkings and another from Brian Eno. Pop arrangements are also present, including sleek versions of songs by Björk, James Blake and Thom Yorke, but again these tend towards musical wallpaper, despite some luminous sustained lines from Gillam. *Orbit* by Will Gregory is a welcome contrast, with Gillam belting out some stylish licks and growls on the alto, at first accompanied by marimba and then by electric bass and strings. This is meaty sax playing, perhaps not the most subtle tonally, but unquestionably authentic and committed.

Jess Gillam is unstoppable – a bulletproof performer with a seemingly limitless capacity for new projects and ventures. She did well to bag Decca Classics' first ever multi-album deal for a saxophonist, although this appears to have come with a slightly corporate kind of creative supervision. Even so, *Time* will doubtless soothe and inspire many, and both of Gillam's albums with Decca are pioneering in their way. Congrats, Jess, on playing your part in reinventing the classical sax.

Chris Walters