



Clarinet & Saxophone

Spring 2023 Volume 48, No 1

Qi gong and music

STÉPHANIE CARNE SHARES HOW THIS ANCIENT PRACTICE CAN HELP YOUR PLAYING

Stanley Drucker

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Unsung Heroine

PAMELA HARRISON

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TIPS FOR BASS CLARINETISTS

PLUS: FREE SHEET MUSIC BY PAMELA HARRISON | NEW RECORDING OF HER WORKS
GEAR NEWS & REVIEWS | KINAN AZMEH'S CLARINET CONCERTO | EVENTS DIARY

A portrait of Pamela Harrison, a woman with short, wavy, light-colored hair, smiling and looking slightly to the right. She is wearing a dark, off-the-shoulder top with a small brooch at the neckline. The background is dark and out of focus.

Back in the spotlight

Composer Pamela Harrison is not as well known as she deserves to be. Robert Plane, who has made the world premiere recordings of her clarinet chamber pieces, explains how they were inspired by her friendship with Jack Brymer – and why they have been undeservedly obscure until now

Pamela Harrison belongs to a generation of women composers who enjoyed success at the outset of their careers in the aftermath of the second world war, but faded into obscurity as the establishment turned towards the European avant-garde. Like Ruth Gipps, six years her junior and whose clarinet music was explored in an article in the Spring 2021 edition of this magazine, Harrison struggled to be regarded as an equal in the male-dominated world of composition.

Pamela Harrison was born in Orpington, Kent, on 25 November 1915 and went on to study composition and piano at the Royal College of Music with Gordon Jacob and Arthur Benjamin respectively. She regularly performed her own piano compositions whilst a student, as well as partnering string colleagues in sonatas by Fauré and Delius, composers who exerted a strong influence on her early writing. Jacob was hugely supportive of Harrison's creative talents, and remained so beyond her student years. He wrote enthusiastically, "I want to tell you how beautiful your viola sonata is. This is not a biased judgement, but the plain truth. There is a beauty of sound about it all which is enthralling. You have, as I have told you before, real genius." Harrison's husband Harvey Phillips, the eminent cellist of the Hirsch and Grinke Quartets, supported her career and gave many high-profile performances of her work, in particular with his own Harvey Phillips String Orchestra. Many musicians I've spoken to fondly remember Phillips conducting them as students at the Royal College of Music, not least my own teacher, Angela Malsbury, in a performance of the Finzi Clarinet Concerto.

'I want to tell you how beautiful your viola sonata is. This is not a biased judgement, but the plain truth. There is a beauty of sound about it all which is enthralling. You have, as I have told you before, real genius.'

Gordon Jacob

Close musical and personal friendships were always central to Harrison's inspiration, and hers with clarinetist Jack Brymer was particularly fruitful, resulting in three works. Considering the illustrious career that Jack Brymer enjoyed, it has always seemed surprising to me that so few composers wrote works especially for him. Cecil Armstrong Gibbs, Alan Richardson and Guy Woolfenden did produce pieces for Brymer, but this is dwarfed by the number of new works that Gervase de Peyer, for example, commissioned and premiered in the same era. But it turns out that there ➡



Left: Jack Brymer premiered Harrison's *Drifting Away* in 1975 at Sherbourne School

Right: Press cutting from the *Radio Times*, 8th January 1954





were in fact other works inspired by Brymer's artistry, dedicated to this childhood clarinet hero of mine and which have, until recently, faded from memory.

Jack Brymer and Harvey Phillips had met teaching at the Royal College of Music in the early 1950s and Jack and his wife Joan were to become lifelong friends of Harrison and Phillips. Both of Harrison's sons, Tim and Paul, remember jovial visits to their Somerset house from the Brymers, arriving with their son, Tim, in a Triumph convertible. They impressed on me that their mother not only revered Jack as the exceptional musician he was, but also revelled in his wicked sense of humour. They also fondly recalled Joan Brymer's penchant for matching mauve clothes and hair, which clearly stuck in the memories of the teenage boys!

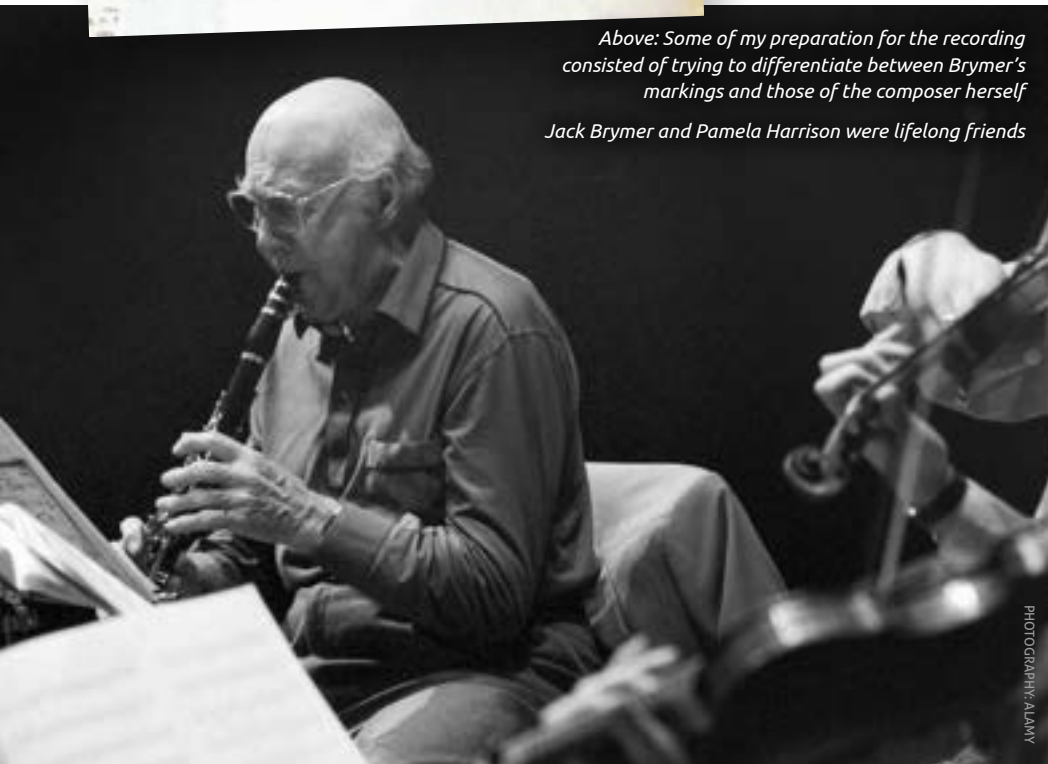
The first and grittiest of the works resulting from this collaboration, the Clarinet Sonata, dates from 1953. Harrison's is a language of striking bitonality and semi-tonal dissonance, in a dramatic opening *Andante appassionato*, dark and brooding and characterised by its intense rhythmic anxiety. Harrison excelled in writing emotive slow movements, and those found in her clarinet works are the equal of any of those of her male contemporaries, I would venture to suggest. In the sonata she produces a radiant, *con affetto* oasis, regretful and nostalgic in tone and deeply heartfelt. The subsequent finale is a highly effective *ostinato*, hurtling at breakneck speed towards an emphatic repetition of a tritone fanfare figure which pervades much of the movement.

The Sonata is a truly substantial piece, requiring the all the physicality demanded by the Howells Sonata, a work composed just seven years earlier. As well as having access to the composer's hand-written score, I was able to locate a copy of Jack's own 'working' clarinet part. Some of my preparation for the recording consisted of trying to differentiate between Brymer's markings and those of the composer herself. Many of the additional crescendo marks are clearly there to encourage a *sostenuto* approach to the interpretation. Other clues were invaluable; Brymer's addition of 'strict' after a rubato bar, for example, clearing up any ambiguity that would otherwise have existed, and extra up and down hairpins clarifying that more short-term phrasing was required rather than searching for a longer line. Brymer's rich, creamy sound is surely at the heart of both works' inspirational slow movements.

Three years later Harrison completed her second major work for Brymer, the Quintet for clarinet and strings. He broadcast this work twice on the BBC Third Programme, first in 1956 with the Hirsch Quartet (in a totally new line-up and now without Harvey Phillips). Two years later he

partnered the Amici Quartet in another live broadcast. Although the first movement sets off much more jovially than any of the music in the clarinet sonata, a persistent minor third figure, often in an ominous dotted rhythm, soon unsettles proceedings. Again, we are treated to a slow movement of great emotional intensity, with yearning minor thirds once more playing their part. Most striking perhaps are the two passages where time seems to stand still, the clarinet exploring a searching, ascending line built on rising thirds, over static string harmony. The final *Allegro molto e agitato* scurries furtively, tripping the listener up rhythmically with unexpectedly shortened bars. The movement culminates in a canonic celebration of a version of the work's very opening theme, alternating bars of three and four time and seeming to create the joyous effect of peeling bells.

Above: Some of my preparation for the recording consisted of trying to differentiate between Brymer's markings and those of the composer herself
Jack Brymer and Pamela Harrison were lifelong friends



PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY

Pamela Harrison not only revered Jack Brymer as the exceptional musician that he was, but also revelled in his wicked sense of humour

Harrison enjoyed composing short, occasional pieces, many of which are languid and evocative. *Drifting Away*, one of Harrison's most poignant creations, was first performed in 1975 by Brymer and David Lloyd for Sherbourne School Concert Club, and is inspired by W.B. Yeats' line 'All that's beautiful drifts away. Like the waters.' It was included in the Jack Brymer Clarinet Series published by Weinberger in 1976, and so is the most likely way any readers may have strayed across Harrison's music to date. Fittingly, this was to be the work that Brymer performed at the service of thanksgiving for Pamela Harrison's life in December 1990, following her tragic death in a car accident on 28 August.

Playing and researching Harrison's clarinet works has been one of my most rewarding projects to date. I first heard about Harrison in 2015 when Michael Bryant contacted me with some repertoire ideas for future recordings. British clarinet music of the 20th century has always been my passion and recordings of little-known works by York Bowen, Robin Milford, Josef Holbrooke, Cyril Scott and William Alwyn sit alongside classics of the repertoire by Bax, Ireland, Stanford and Finzi in my discography. At the time I was knee-deep in researching repertoire for my *Reawakened* disc for Champs Hill Records: concertos by Iain Hamilton, Ruth Gipps and Richard H. Walthew. (An interesting coincidence revealed by my research was that Richard Walthew's son, Richard S. Walthew, featured as clarinetist in the premiere of Harrison's Suite for Wind Quartet at the Fyvie Hall of London Polytechnic in 1944).

It was only in 2019 when Harrison's son, Timothy Phillips, invited me to play the Bliss Clarinet Quintet at his East Devon Festival and asked me if I would like to see a score of his mother's Clarinet Quintet, that I remembered Michael Bryant's previous contact, and my curiosity was aroused. Not only had Michael sent me a recording of Brymer's broadcast performance of the Clarinet Sonata, I also discovered from the website dedicated to Pamela Harrison's works a four-minute YouTube clip taken from Brymer's BBC broadcast of the quintet with the Amici Quartet in 1959. I was intrigued to find out more about this forgotten composer and her works for the clarinet, and to commit them to disc.

Jack Brymer was the first professional clarinetist I had ever heard, and the day that he came to play the Mozart Concerto in the Hippodrome in my home town of Great Yarmouth with the London Mozart Players is forever etched on my memory. Although he must have been desperate to get straight back on his legendary motorbike and home to London after the performance, he took the time to meet 14-year-old me in the interval, and to sign my copies of his Menuhin Music Guide to the clarinet and as his autobiography *From Where I Sit*.

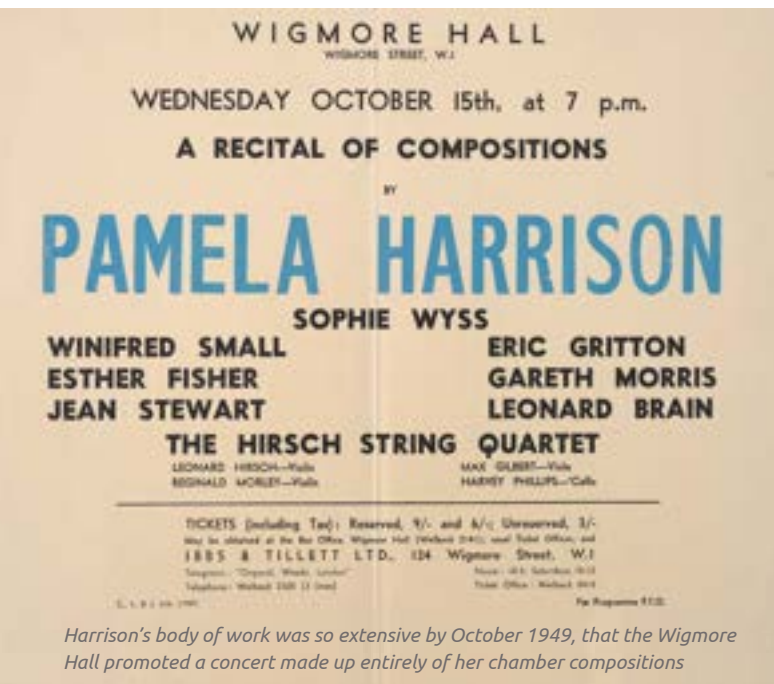
I received financial support from the Ambache Charitable Trust, the Vaughan Williams Foundation, and a research award from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD), where I am now Head of Woodwind, to enable me to record Harrison's clarinet works for Resonus Classics in April 2022, alongside her piano trio, violin sonatina and a collection of short character pieces. Recorded in the magnificent Dora Stoutzker Hall of RWCMD, we were delighted that Tim Phillips was able to be in residence to hear his mother's works being brought back to life.

But my delving into the life of this little-known composer ended up taking me far beyond examining the manuscripts of just the works themselves. ➡

Harrison was undoubtedly a composer swimming doggedly against the tide of the prejudice of her time

Pamela Harrison and her husband, cellist Harvey Phillips

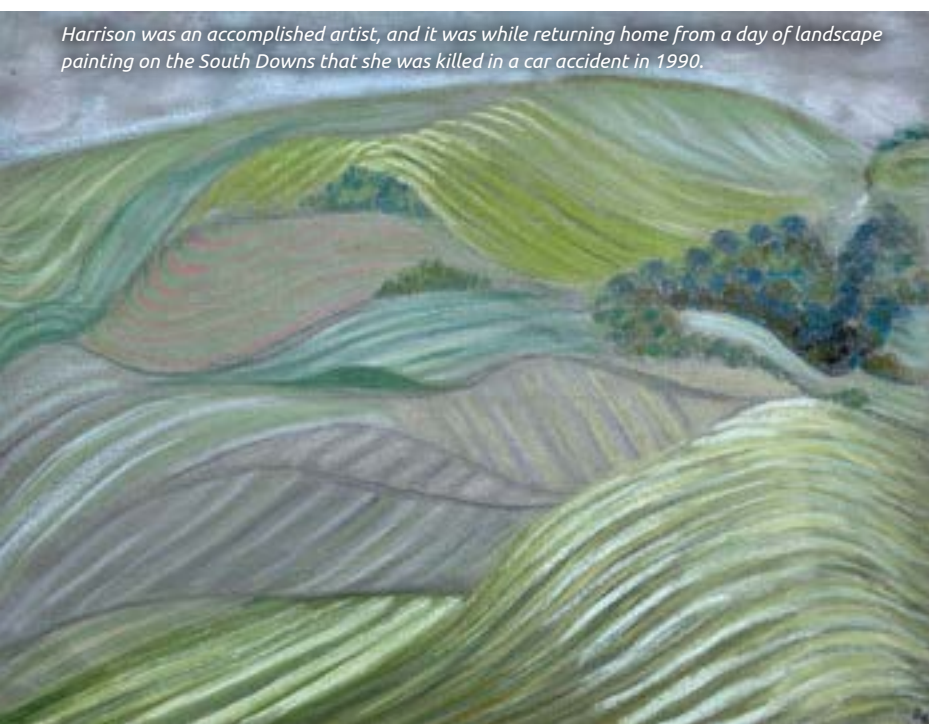




Harrison's body of work was so extensive by October 1949, that the Wigmore Hall promoted a concert made up entirely of her chamber compositions



Visitors to the first ever exhibition celebrating the life and music of Pamela Harrison at the 2022 Corbridge Chamber Music Festival



Harrison was an accomplished artist, and it was while returning home from a day of landscape painting on the South Downs that she was killed in a car accident in 1990.

I subsequently visited Tim Phillips' house near Honiton in Devon, where he kept an immaculately preserved collection of his mother's correspondence with luminaries of the music world, as well as press cuttings and reviews. Harrison was undoubtedly a composer swimming doggedly against the tide of the prejudice of her time. A review in *The Times* of a performance by Peter Pears of her Dowson settings declares that one particular poem, *Cynara*, "is not for a woman to set". Announcing the first broadcast performance of her Quintet for flute, oboe, violin, viola and cello, the *Radio Times* lists the composer as "wife of Harvey Phillips", even though he was not involved in that particular performance. And the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* entry on Harrison doesn't deserve repetition here – but nobody listening to the muscular, indeed abrasive writing of her Clarinet Sonata would think its description of her musical style apt.

It was a thrill it was to be handling letters from Vaughan Williams, Herbert Howells, Gordon Jacob and Gerard Hoffnung, amongst many others, as I carried out my research. This collection formed the basis of a major exhibition celebrating Harrison's life and work at the Corbridge Chamber Music Festival in July 2022, which I direct alongside the Gould Piano Trio. I also conducted a performance of Harrison's *Suite for Timothy* there, a gift from mother to son on Tim's first birthday, given in Corbridge by an orchestra formed of the string players of the Gould Trio and the Elias Quartet performing alongside local amateur players in our 'Festival String Orchestra'. Sadly, by this time Tim Phillips, so instrumental to the success of this project, was suffering from ill health and unable to attend. Tim died just a week after we received the first edits of the CD. I know that making his mother's music available on disc meant the world to him and that listening to the performances brought him solace in his final days.

As with all recordings of rediscovered repertoire, the hope now is that other clarinetists will take up this repertoire and programme it themselves in concert. *Drifting Away*, such a tender, poignant work and surely a perfect encore piece, is an ideal place to start to explore the music that resulted from this great friendship between a now-neglected composer and one of the finest exponents of the clarinet that this country has ever produced. ■

Robert Plane's new world premiere recording of Pamela Harrison's Chamber music is reviewed on page 42.

Top 5 Pamela Harrison Recordings

- **A Suite for Timothy**
Royal Ballet Sinfonia/ Gavin Sutherland
English String Miniatures vol.5, Naxos
- **Clarinet Quintet**
Robert Plane, Lucy Gould, David Adams,
Gary Pomeroy and Richard Lester
Resonus Classics
- **Viola Sonata**
Helen Callus, Robert McDonald
Portrait of the Viola, ASV
- **Clarinet Sonata**
Robert Plane, Benjamin Frith
Resonus Classics
- **Lament for viola and piano**
Hillary Herndon, Wei-Chun Bernadette Lo
MSR Classics

PAMELA HARRISON: Drifting Away

Inspired by W.B. Yeats and dedicated to Jack Brymer, Pamela Harrison's Drifting Away is an example of her gift for writing slow and lyrical music, says Robert Plane

Drifting Away exemplifies Pamela Harrison's extraordinary gift for writing beautiful slow movements, encapsulating the sense of regret in W.B. Yeats' line 'All that's beautiful drifts away. Like the waters' from his poem *The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water*. Composed in 1974 for Jack Brymer and one of his regular duo partners, David Lloyd, it is a perfect introduction to Harrison's lyrical music. Harrison clearly preferred writing for the A clarinet, with all three of her works for clarinet exploiting its rich qualities. Throughout *Drifting Away*, the piano supports with a lilting, piquant rocking figure, over which the clarinet line unfolds with great patience. The opening line requires a good degree of breath control. Whilst it is certainly possible to build in a breath here, it feels like this opening phrase would ideally spin without interruption.

Harrison is drawn to the upper register of the clarinet, and the second phrase requires some refined high-register control at the composer's requested *piano* dynamic. Motivic repetition is also a hallmark of her style and gives the performer the opportunity to find subtle re-colourings of re-harmonised, bar-long units. The performer needs to be wary of keeping the pitch flat enough in the increasingly quiet bars with which the piece ends. This piece is accessible for clarinetists of all levels, although the high tessitura may take some work to be able to control. Above all, it is a longing, poignant piece, in which we can showcase our sounds and ability to play *cantabile* melodic lines, to great effect. It is an excellent introduction to Harrison's other more challenging works for the instrument, and a tantalising glimpse of what this composer might have achieved had the prevailing climate been more favourable for women composers.



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DRIFTING AWAY

PAMELA HARRISON

Clarinet in A

Lento espressivo (♩ = 108)

p tranquillo

cresc.

mf *p*

pp lontano

p *mp*

p *pp* *mp*

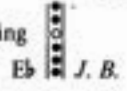
p

poco rit. *a tempo*

mf *mp* *p* *pp*

The musical score consists of eight staves of music in G major. The first staff begins with the tempo marking *largamente* and a dynamic of *mp*. The second staff includes a *poco rit.* marking and a dynamic of *mf*, followed by a *largamente* marking with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 104$ and a dynamic of *f*. A box containing the number 50 is placed above the staff. The third staff is marked *Tempo 1* with a dynamic of *mp*. The fourth staff has a box containing the number 60 above it. The fifth staff features a dynamic of *p* followed by a triplet of eighth notes and a dynamic of *f*. The sixth staff is marked *poch. rit.* and *a tempo* with a dynamic of *mf* and a box containing the number 70 above it. The seventh staff includes a dynamic of *mf*, followed by a dynamic of *p*, and then a dynamic of *pp* with a *rit.* marking. The eighth staff is marked *meno mosso* with a dynamic of *p*, followed by a dynamic of *pp*, and then a dynamic of *ppp* with a *rit.* marking and a box containing the number 80 above it.

* Top F# should, if possible, be played with a 'closed' fingering



J. B.



PAMELA HARRISON CHAMBER WORKS
Robert Plane (clarinet), Gould Piano Trio,
David Adams (violin), Gary Pomeroy (viola)
Resonus

While studying clarinet at the Guildhall around the turn of the millennium, I would often sit in the college library listening to Thea King's recordings of works by Howells, Cooke, Rawsthorne and other treasures of the 1950s and 60s. This pocket of English chamber music featuring the clarinet remains a favourite – a purple patch of urbane, reserved, emotive and gently modernist repertoire, somehow completely English in the best possible sense.

From its opening notes, this recital transported me straight back to those library listening sessions, though I regret now that the music of Pamela Harrison (1915-1990) was not a feature of these. All the works presented on this new release are world premiere recordings – better late than never, but it is sad indeed that they were not recorded sooner.

Clarinetist Robert Plane is a dedicated advocate of British clarinet music and made the premiere recording of Ruth Gipps' Clarinet Concerto in 2019. He offers a substantial essay on Harrison in this CD's sleeve notes, detailing her life, work and unjustified neglect by the musical establishment. Plane rails against the sexism she faced, which included needing support from her famous cellist husband to get her works performed. Even these opportunities dried up when the couple later separated. Examples of the prejudiced treatment she was forced to endure are many and varied, from criticism that she dared set 'masculine' poems to music, to being patronisingly described in *Grove* as 'a slow writer' who 'produced a small output characterised by femininity and clarity.'

Born in Orpington to a successful musical family, Harrison studied at the Royal College of Music as both a pianist and a composer. She frequently performed in her own concerts and was championed by her teacher Gordon Jacob, who thought her Viola Sonata was touched by genius. She worked fruitfully across many instrumental and vocal combinations, and in all likelihood would not have thought of herself as a clarinet specialist, despite writing a series of works for the instrument that were inspired by her friendship with Jack Brymer.

The earliest work presented on this recording is the Sonatina for Violin and Piano from 1949. Its first movement opens with a statuesque melody with contrasting skittish semiquaver passages, sombre in mood, with bursts of playfulness. The middle slow movement continues in a similar vein but with greater emotional depth and some interesting thematic development. The finale is lively but still close in feel to the other movements, giving a sense of unified musical architecture. Violinist Lucy Gould and pianist Benjamin Frith perform excellently.

Plane gives an inspiring performance with a wide dynamic range and superb intonation. He is a formidable player, combining the best of the 'English' mellifluous tone with modern levels of technical assurance

The 1953 Sonata for Clarinet and Piano features Plane and Frith. Like the previous work it has three movements and a soloistic piano part, making both works true duos as their titles suggest. There are shades of Arnold Bax and John Ireland here, but Harrison's music is more rhythmic and demonstrative. It offers little by way of simple consolation, but has remarkable emotional honesty.

The Sonata's first movement runs to an expansive six minutes, building to a crazed climactic section with some darkly comic dissonances in the piano – audacious stuff. The four-minute second movement offers gentle repose and sensitive melodic exchanges between the two players, before the third spins us into a frenzy of excitement, culminating in an elegiac coda. Plane gives an inspiring performance with a wide dynamic range and superb intonation. He is a formidable player, combining the best of the 'English' mellifluous tone with modern levels of technical assurance.

The 1956 Quintet for Clarinet and Strings opens the record (but as in the sleeve notes, I have chosen to discuss the works chronologically here). It showcases some swoon-worthy string textures dovetailing immaculately with the clarinet – testament to Harrison's abilities as an orchestrator.

The Quintet's compact first movement could be compared with Howells' *Rhapsodic Quintet* in the breadth of its scope and ambition, but Harrison loses no ground to Howells in terms of artistic vision. The second movement is

a spacious meditation featuring a floating clarinet melody that opens out majestically, while the third is another thrillingly full-blooded Harrison finale. Plane and Gould are joined by David Adams (violin), Gary Pomeroy (viola) and Richard Lester (cello), and everyone does a tremendous job, their respect for this rediscovered repertoire clearly shining through.

The first movement of Harrison's 1966 Piano Trio curiously reuses the opening theme of the Clarinet Quintet but with a more baroque contrapuntal treatment. The second movement runs to eight minutes and is characterised by open, spread chords in the piano, over which the violin and cello are given languid, yearning solos. A bright *Animato* closes the work.

Four single-movement items intersperse the larger works – charming lollipops with piano accompaniment for cello (*Sonnet, Idle Dan*), bassoon (*Faggot Dance*, performed by Florence Plane) and clarinet (*Drifting Away*). Each one is decidedly sophisticated, belying surface appearances of simplicity. *Drifting Away* is a particularly touching piece that was performed by Brymer at the composer's funeral. In the wake of this fine recording, let us hope that the music of Pamela Harrison soon drifts back into focus.

Chris Walters