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## Sir Arnold Bax

### English Music Society Recordings

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# BAX

PRISTINE  
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## Viola Sonata

William Primrose, viola  
Harriet Cohen, piano

## Nonett

The Griller String Quartet  
(Augmented)

## Mater Ora Filium

The BBC Chorus  
Leslie Woodgate, conductor

English Music Society  
Recordings, 1937/38



I was only able to allude briefly to the issue of this album in last month's GRAMOPHONE, but if there are some readers who are hesitating whether to purchase it, let me assure them that, unlike some other albums of music by contemporary composers, everything in it is not only representative of Bax at his best, but splendidly recorded. On that point the only place where some improvement suggests itself is in the *Viola Sonata* where the upper reaches of the piano sound too distant: the bass is well balanced with the solo instrument. The sonata itself is a work of finely sustained imagination and deep emotion, written, as Robin Hull, who provides the excellent notes, says, in a mood of "impassioned and sombre beauty allied in movements of vehemence and meditation." It is rich in melody of a kind immediately apprehended and has a middle movement of tremendous energy and power. I could wish, irrationally, that Bax had not disturbed that mood with a rhapsodic and slow version of this third theme which seems to me to slacken dangerously the tension of the movement.

Mr. Hull, by the way, sometimes leads one to expect more than one gets. No doubt he was writing from the score and not from the records, but some of his adjectives are not realised in the performance. Thus on the last record of the first movement I doubt if the ostinato figure will be heard as "briant" or the re-entry of the first subject as "exceedingly strenuous"; nor does the climax at the end of the second movement strike me as "verflic" "Such, too, the "rather mysterious chords on the piano" that open the last movement are related rather to the ominous ones that begin the coda of the previous movement than to the gentle ones that begin the first movement. The "satanic" mood, that is, of the *Adagio* still prevails until dispersed by the brooding sadness of this final movement. Harriet Cohen played the work with Lionel Tertis at the 1924 Salzburg Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music and her close association with Bax's music gives her complete understanding of it. She has one of the finest viola players of today, William Primrose, as her partner with the result that the performance is of the finest quality.

Forbes Watson (bass), Gordon Slater (flute), Frederick Thurston (clarinet), Leon Goossens (oboe), and Marie Kordhinska (harp) join the Griller String Quartet in the performance of the *Nonett*. This work is indeed a striking example of Bax's "remarkable flair for exploring the piquant blends and contrasts of colour which such a combination makes possible." But interplay of colour is by no means the only interest in this charming work. It defines what we feel but cannot accurately express in words by romanticism, but again, beyond its colour and its lovely evocative sound, its emotional significance may perhaps be found in the dedication to the memory of Eric Verney-Cohen. The *Lento* section of the first of the two movements has a dance-like beauty which is found again at the end of the second movement. I found this short work extraordinarily moving.

Finally we come to Bax's magnificent setting of the old carol *Mater Ora Filium*, which some readers will perhaps still possess in the H.M.V. version issued long ago. It is an exceptionally difficult work to perform though the writing sounds beautifully fluid and graceful. Leslie Woodgate secures an admirable rendering from the B.B.C. chorus and the recording is without any of the character or construction which often afflicts such recordings.

A. R., *The Gramophone*, August 1939 (review, pp.25-26)

### Transfer notes

These transfers were made from quiet US Columbia pressings generously donated to Pristine by Mr. Albert Schachmeyer. Overall quality was very good, though some sides suffered from swish, though I was able to minimise this by careful and varied stylus selection. The final piece, *Mater Ora Filium*, was recorded at a significantly higher level than the rest of the album and some blasting during louder sections had to be dealt with, particularly during the final side. On the plus side this louder recording did eventually allow for a much lower noise floor after processing than in either of the instrumental works.

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## Bax English Music Society Recordings

## BAX Sonata for Viola and Piano

- 1st mvmt. - **Molto moderato** (11:24)
- 2nd mvmt. - **Allegro energico ma non troppo presto** (6:59)
- 3rd mvmt. - **Molto lento** (9:08)

**William Primrose** **viola**

**Harriet Cohen** **piano**

Recorded 22 July 1937

Matrix numbers CAX 8047-53, all first takes except side 6, take 3

## BAX Nonett

- 4 1st mvmt. - **Molto moderato** (8:30)  
5 2nd mvmt. - **Allegro** (6:42)

### The Griller Quartet:

**Sidney Griller** violin

**Jack O'Brien** violin

**Philip Burton** **viola**

**Colin Hampton** cello

**Victor Watson** double bass

**Joseph Slater** flute

**Frederick Thurston** clarinet

Leon Goossens oboe

**Maria Korchinska** *harp*

Recorded 1 February 1937

Matrix numbers CAX 7922-25, all first takes except side 3, take 2

- 6 BAX Mater Ora Filium (10:22)

**BBC Chorus** **Leslie Woodgate**

Recorded 2 December 1938

Matrix numbers CAX 8402-04, all first takes except side 2, take 2



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XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Special thanks to **Ciara O'Reilly** for assistance in preparing this project

Transfers from Columbia  
Masterworks set M-386

Cover artwork based on a photograph of **Sir Arnold Bax**

Viola by Joannes Baptista  
Guadagnini, Milan c.1755

**Total duration: 53:05**

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