

Thomas Pitfield

String Chamber Music

The Pleyel Ensemble:

Sarah Ewins (Violin), Heather Bills (Cello), Harvey Davies (Piano)



Thomas Pitfield - String Chamber Music

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Piano Trio No. 1 in C major

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|----|------|-----------------------------|------|
| 1. | I. | Molto moderato | 5:53 |
| 2. | II. | Andante pastorale | 5:20 |
| 3. | III. | Allegro moderato ma agitato | 5:17 |

Piano Trio No. 2 in F minor (Lyric)

- | | | | |
|----|------|--|------|
| 4. | I. | Allegro marcato | 5:47 |
| 5. | II. | Larghetto solenne - Allegro quasi allegretto | 5:45 |
| 6. | III. | Allegro marcato | 6:07 |

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|----|--|---|------|
| 7. | | Epigraph for violin, cello and piano | 1:51 |
|----|--|---|------|

Sonatina for cello and piano

- | | | | |
|-----|------|--|------|
| 8. | I. | Preludio (<i>Allegro risoluto</i>) | 3:18 |
| 9. | II. | Arietta (<i>Andantino dolce</i>) | 2:33 |
| 10. | III. | Scherzino (<i>Allegretto grazioso</i>) | 2:33 |
| 11. | IV. | Toccata (<i>Allegro vivace</i>) | 2:11 |

Sonata in D minor for cello and piano

- | | | | |
|-----|------|---|------|
| 12. | I. | Variations (<i>Allegro</i>) | 4:58 |
| 13. | II. | Pastoral Interlude (<i>Andantino</i>) | 4:17 |
| 14. | III. | Epilogue (<i>Allegro</i>) | 4:17 |

Total playing time 60:36

Thomas Baron Pitfield (5 April 1903 – 11 November 1999)

Notes on the music

The cello was Thomas Pitfield's own instrument, and he received lessons in his youth from the cellist Katherine Moorhouse, the first wife of the Manchester composer Eric Fogg (Uncle Eric of BBC Children's Hour), both of whom became hospitable friends to Pitfield. One of Fogg's last pieces, the beautiful *Ode to a Nightingale*, to the poem by Keats, was much published by Elkin with a striking cover designed by Pitfield.

Cello pieces published at the start of Pitfield's career (by Augener in 1934) were a *Pavan* (1929) and *Reel* (1928), both first performed at the Bolton Musical Artists' Association on 21st November 1931, though a third piece, *Waltz*, performed on the same occasion, is now lost.

The substantial *Cello Sonata in D Minor* was written in 1937/38 but had to wait until 1949 when it was published by Francis Day and Hunter. The *Sonatina*, dedicated to the cellist Oliver Vella and his wife Sheila, was published by Cramer six years later. No details of the premieres are known at present. Other later works for the cello were a set of *Celtic Tunes*, dedicated to the cellist Dorothea Campey, and a set of *Scottish Tunes*, dedicated to the cellist Paul Ward.

Surprisingly the mature Pitfield published no string quartets except for a tiny *Minuet and Trio*, in an OUP series, and sadly a piano quartet, premiered in 1945 by an ensemble led by Martin Milner, appears to be lost, but the two surviving piano trios are among his most substantial and successful works. The first was composed in 1930 and dedicated to Alice M. Astbury (later to become his wife). It was one of his first works to be published by the Oxford University Press, in 1933. The premiere was given in a private OUP concert on 16 March 1933, the performers being Louis Godowsky, Sheridan Russell and no less than Hubert Foss himself. Foss subsequently became a good friend of Tom's, and gave him much work, including designing music covers and greetings cards. It was given a public premiere on 29th October 1933 by the New London Trio (John Pauer, Jean Pougnet, and Norma Semino). The trio was published under his full name of Thomas Baron Pitfield, which he later eschewed, as the suggestion of noble ancestry was

unwelcome and embarrassing to him (it was merely a family surname!) This substantial and serious early work is in a much more harmonically advanced style than his later music, and exhibits few of the distinctive footprints of his later works.

The second piano trio, just entitled in the surviving photocopy manuscript “Lyric Trio”, was written in 1948/9, but it has not so far been possible to ascertain details of any performances before the work was revived for a celebration of the composer’s 80th birthday, when it was played on 6th May 1983 in All Saints Church Altrincham, by the Arensky Trio, Louise Latham (violin), Stephen Threlfall (cello) and Kathleen Uren (piano). It remained unpublished.

Two shorter pieces for piano trio are an early *Pastoral*, published by the Cecilian Press (not included in this recording), and *Epigraph*, based on fragments from an ostinato by the Russian composer Arensky, written for The Arensky Trio.

It is quite likely that there were other string chamber music works, destroyed or quarried for other pieces by the composer. Once a work had been played, Pitfield was quite likely to destroy or give away the manuscript, or use the material in other works. The most extreme example of this is his superb violin concerto, where the conductor of the BBC broadcast gave a perfunctory performance and made it clear that he did not care for the work. Pitfield tore out the outer movements and destroyed them, much to the distress of his pupil John McCabe, and indeed Pitfield always regretted what had happened. However, all was not lost, as he had forgotten that a microfilm of the work had been made, and a search of his garage after his death revealed it. The soloist in the broadcast, Peter Mountain, had so loved the work that he set it from the microfilm, free of charge, and it is now admired and commercially recorded.

John Turner

Thomas Pitfield

Thomas Pitfield (1903-1999) was born in Bolton, Lancashire, into a conventional and narrow-minded working-class family. Drawn to music and driven by a compelling urge to compose, he overcame initial setbacks and gained a musical grounding through private lessons in piano, cello and harmony. Employed unhappily in the drawing-office of a local engineering firm, he saved enough money to pay for a year's study at the Royal Manchester College of Music, mainly studying harmony and cello, after which he scraped a modest living for seven years from a mixture of music teaching, composition, writing and art. In 1931 Oxford University Press published his *Prelude, Minuet and Reel* for piano, which became one of his best known works. In the same year he gained a scholarship to study at the Bolton School of Art as a teacher of craft and cabinet-work. This led to a variety of teaching posts in the Midlands, but music was his creative focus and as more of his works were performed and published his reputation as a composer grew. From 1947 to 1973 he taught composition one day a week at the RMCM, where his pupils included David Ellis, Christopher Littlewood, John McCabe, John Ogdon, Max Paddison and Ronald Stevenson. The rest of the week he devoted himself to composing.

Pitfield was largely self-taught as a composer and considered himself to be one working in and closely allied to the community. His music was often written for specific occasions or performers, much of it for friends, amateurs or children. His style was typically light-hearted and small-scale, with frequent reference to folk-music and often using irregular rhythms. Larger-scale pieces included two piano concertos, concertos for violin, cello and recorder, and more than a dozen stage works, including the morality plays *The Devil in White* (composed in 1939 in pacifist protest at unfolding events in Europe) and *Adam and the Creatures* (1968), the operas for young performers *Coney Warren* (n.d.) and *Tansy* (1956), and several ballets. *Night Music* (1941) was an outstanding contribution to the unaccompanied choral repertoire and his cantatas *A Sketchbook of Men* and *A Sketchbook of Women*, both published in 1953, were deservedly popular. He became a notable and prolific composer who enjoyed numerous performances and broadcasts of his works, especially in the North West region of England, some by leading artists such as John Barbiroli, Vilém Tauský, Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, John McCabe, and Ronald Stevenson.

Although his main focus was music, Pitfield was also an artist, craftsman and poet, and was interested in nature study, religion, philosophy and folklore; as a result of having such a wide range of interests he found life to be 'endless fascination.' In everything he did, good design

and the desire to give pleasure through the way things looked and the quality of the materials they were made from were paramount, not least in the house in Bowdon, 'Lesser Thorns', which he designed for himself, and the furnishings he made for it. He lived according to principles he worked out for himself, maintaining a modest and honest lifestyle directed by the precepts of vegetarianism and pacifism, keeping faith with his innate gifts to make a living and a home for himself and his like-minded wife Alice. He took immense pleasure in spending time outside walking in the natural world and in particular was drawn to the beauty of trees. His art and craft work reflects the revival of interest in the arts and crafts during the first half of the 20th century, his outstanding work in this area being *The Poetry of Trees*, a series of prose poems written out by him in his calligraphic bookhand, accompanied by superb linocuts of trees, in a binding with boards of English oak and tooled leather, the whole an exquisite complete art work, following the precepts of William Morris and Douglas Cockerell.

Pitfield wrote poetry all his life, producing more than 260 poems. He wrote his poems quite quickly, while travelling on buses, or out walking, or sitting at home with Alice in the evenings, and in a wide variety of established forms, including free verse. He had an enthusiasm for nonsense verse, and relished creating 'an assemblage of related words that click neatly into place.' Most of Pitfield's light and nonsense verse is, however, not aimed at children. It is sophisticated within its genre, written to please himself and make its adult readers smile. An early copyright problem with two poems from James Joyce's *Chamber Music* deterred him from using words by others in his musical settings, as well as the fact that copyright fees payable to the words' authors were deducted from his own fee. With a few exceptions – A.E. Housman, W.B. Yeats, W.H. Davies, Robert Louis Stevenson and Walter de la Mare – he found most contemporary poetry lacking in lyricism and turned to his own poems as a resource, setting many of them over the years, leading him to acknowledge in later life that 'I have perhaps patronised my own lyrics overmuch.'

His short poem 'Words', published in his compilation *Johnnyrobins* (1995), summed up his joy in playing with words:

I love them all -
Words are my playthings.
I toss them like a ball,
I like to say things.

Something along similar lines could be said of his music.

Thomas Pitfield enjoyed a long life, well-lived according to his own unswerving principles. Whether creating music, words, art, calligraphy or bookbindings, he was a honest craftsman who used his skills to make what he believed to be true and important. He wrote several volumes of autobiography of which the first, *No Song, No Supper* (1986) recounts his early struggles, his wartime pacifism and eventual successes with characteristic gentleness and humour, not least in a concluding 'auto obituary' in which he mocked his own profuseness saying that 'it was for his large output in music that he is best forgotten.' Fortunately the current revival of interest in his life and works, reflected in new publications and recordings, means that this is not the case.

Rosemary Firman

The Pleyel Ensemble

The Pleyel Ensemble was formed in Manchester in January 2011. They are friends and colleagues who draw on a wealth of experience gained through many years of music-making. Since forming, they have given over 200 concerts, and have an enormous and varied repertoire of chamber music. The Pleyel Ensemble was delighted to be chosen as ***Making Music Recommended Artists*** for the 2016/17 and 2019/20 seasons and has appeared at Music Societies and Festivals all over the UK.

The ensemble takes its name from the Classical composer Ignaz Pleyel (1757-1831), a brilliant musician and businessman, who, in addition to writing a large body of accessible chamber music, helped increase the popularity of this wonderful kind of music-making amongst amateurs and professionals as both music publisher and piano manufacturer in the early nineteenth century.

The Pleyel Ensemble make British music a priority. Between us we have commissioned or premiered more than a hundred works and recognise both the importance and necessity of continuing this work.

Sarah Ewins (violin)

Sarah began playing the violin at the age of ten. She graduated from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 1989, and continued her post-graduate studies with David Takeno and Grigory Zhislin.

As well as recording for radio and television, Sarah has given numerous recitals and concerto performances both in this country and abroad. In 1990 Sarah joined Sir Yehudi Menuhin in a performance of Bach's Three Violin concerto at the Royal Festival Hall. In 2002 Sarah joined the Halle Orchestra as Associate Leader and has appeared as Guest Leader with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Manchester Camerata.

She is Assistant Leader of the English Sinfonia with whom she recently recorded Holst's Double Violin Concerto. Passionate about chamber music, she is a founder member of the recently-formed and much-acclaimed Halle Soloists and also very much enjoys the work she does with the Education department at the Halle and as violin tutor for the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

Heather Bills (cello)

Heather was born in Adelaide, South Australia and came to the UK on a scholarship to take up studies at the Royal College of Music in London, studying with Christopher Bunting & Amaryllis Fleming, during which time she won the Australia Prize of the Royal Overseas League Competition and prizes for chamber music at the RCM. She participated in solo and chamber music courses with such esteemed musicians as William Pleeth, Jacqueline du Pre, Ralph Kirshbaum and Emmanuel Hurwitz in Banff, Dartington, Prussia Cove, Monterosso & Perugia respectively, where her love for chamber music was firmly established.

Heather was the co-Principal cellist of the Hallé Orchestra from '83-'90 before moving to Anglesey. She has been Principal cellist of the chamber group Ensemble Cymru and of the Welsh Chamber Orchestra for over twenty years. In 1996 she spent a year in Australia as Guest Principal of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. In 2008 she returned to Manchester & re-established a busy freelance career working with the Hallé, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Manchester Camerata, Northern Chamber Orchestra and Opera North. Heather also loves teaching and is a member of staff in the music departments at Junior RNCM, Manchester University and Manchester Grammar School. With her husband, pianist Harvey Davies, she founded and co-directs the Pleyel Ensemble, an exciting chamber group based in Manchester.

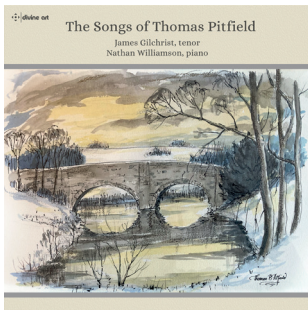
Harvey Davies (piano)

Harvey Davies studied the piano with Helen Davies and David Parkhouse then with Ryszard Bakst at the Royal Northern College of Music. His career as a chamber musician has taken him to four continents and throughout the UK.

With his wife, the 'cellist Heather Bills, Harvey has founded the Manchester-based chamber group *The Pleyel Ensemble*. Comprising wind, strings and piano, the *Pleyels* are known for championing British chamber music and lesser-known Classical works. The Ensemble runs concert series in Mellor and Didsbury and has given hundreds of concerts across the UK since its formation in 2011. In 2019/20 they were *Making Music featured Artists* for the second time in three years. The *Pleyel Ensemble* have released a pioneering four-volume set of the chamber music of Arnold Cooke on the MPR label. Most of the works recorded are world premières. Their recent projects have included programming all of Mozart's works for piano and violin with Sarah Ewins and the complete Haydn piano trios with Sarah and Heather Bills. They are currently performing Beethoven's complete chamber music with piano in their Didsbury concert series, a project which will be completed this year.

Harvey is a Fellow in Historical Performance and a staff pianist at the RNCM and teaches at Chetham's School of Music. He received a PhD in 2022 for his work on the life and music of composer Arnold Cooke. He has collaborated with many eminent musicians including the Alberní, Benyounes, Callino and Carducci Quartets, Atar Arad, Alison Balsom, James Bowman, Rebecca Evans, James Gilchrist, Tony Halstead, Janet Hilton, Guy Johnston, Jennifer Pike and Elena Urioste and as a freelance player, Harvey has worked with the Hallé Orchestra, RLPO, Manchester Camerata, Northern Chamber Orchestra, Manchester Collective and the contemporary music group Ensemble 10/10.

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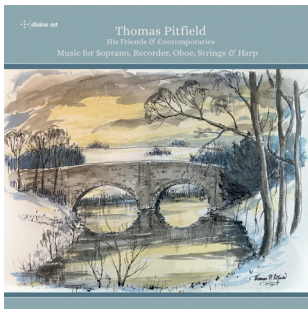


The Songs of Thomas Pitfield

The collection stands as a testament to Pitfield's legacy with evocative interpretations of his songs by acclaimed tenor James Gilchrist, accompanied by the virtuosic pianist Nathan Williamson.

James Gilchrist, tenor
Nathan Williamson, piano

DDX 21119



Thomas Pitfield: His Friends & Contemporaries

A celebration of Pitfield and his contemporaries including John McCabe (1939-2015), Robin Walker (b.1953), Jeremy Pike (b. 1955), Nicholas Marshall (b.1942), Anthony Gilbert (1934-2023), John Turner (b.1943), Richard Pantcheff (b.1959), Stuart Scott (b.1949) and Geoffrey Poole (b.1949).

Lesley-Jane Rogers (soprano)
John Turner (recorder)
Richard Simpson (oboe)
Victoria String Quartet
Alex Jones (double bass)
Lauren Scott (harp)

DDX 21246

Recorded in the Carole Nash Recital Room, Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester,
17th – 19th July 2023
Producer and editor: Mike Purton
Recording Engineer: David Coyle
The Pleyel Ensemble – Sarah Ewins: Violin (Tracks 1-7), Heather Bills: Cello (Tracks 1-14), Harvey
Davies: Piano (Tracks 1-14)

Piano trio No. 1 in C minor and Piano Trio No. 2 in F minor published by OUP
Piano Trio No. 2 in F minor (Lyric) pending publication by Forsyth's
Sonatina for cello and piano published by J.B. Cramer & Co. Ltd
Sonata in D minor for cello and piano published by Francis, Day and Hunter Ltd
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Sarah Ewins (violin)



Heather Bills (cello)



Harvey Davies (piano)

