

Variations on a theme by Mozart by George Malcolm – Introduction and Notes

When I retired from teaching at the end of 2012 I was immediately asked to organise (for Autumn 2013) a concert featuring JSB's multi-harpsichord concertos. As I had the time for such eccentric quests this set me off on the trail of the works for four harpsichords that I knew had been created for George Malcolm and his colleagues in the 1950s. A variety of sources, including the Southbank Centre programme archive, confirmed my memory that these were:

- Concerto after Vivaldi – Thurston Dart (a *L'estro armonico* arrangement, like Bach's 4 harpsichord concerto)
- Concerto after CPE Bach – Raymond Leppard (expansion of a double concerto)
- Variations on a theme by Mozart by GM himself – an absolutely brilliant piece of pastiche writing

Extensive enquiries among GM's circle of admirers led me to the conclusion that the George Malcolm Archive (housed at Balliol College, Oxford of which GM was both a graduate and an Honorary Fellow) was the place to search and I would like at this point to record with gratitude the help I have had from Christopher Hirons, GM's executor and by an astonishing coincidence the violin teacher of the leader of the last school orchestra for which I had responsibility! Christopher, as copyright holder, has also agreed that this music can be made freely available to all who wish to play it. I must also record my thanks to Anna Sanders, the Balliol archivist, who was kept very busy during my visit.

The GM archive is in 26 boxes, mostly of music, though there is also everything the writer of a biography could ever wish to find – concert programmes, diaries, correspondence, discography, reviews etc. A summary list of the collection is available and is accurate though, naturally, not comprehensive. Mine was neither a scientific nor a scholarly investigation of the archive. I was assisted by Martin Hall, a fellow GM fan, and ours was a focussed search for the repertoire mentioned above.

In Box 13 we did indeed find both the score (in pencil, with few clefs or key signatures!) and parts (in ink) of Malcolm's *Variations on a theme by Mozart*. (The theme is from the Duo for Violin and Viola K424, where it is also the theme for a completely different set of variations. GM's piece is *not* an arrangement.) These have comprehensive expression and registration markings relating to the eight-pedalled instruments used for the performances and recording (which can be heard on YouTube) and it might now be difficult to bring together 'instruments of the period' to give an 'authentic' performance. Pressure of other work meant that it has taken far longer than I had hoped to type-set an edition and I apologise for the delay to those who have been waiting.

The parts were treated as the primary source though the edition also incorporates comments from the score where these clarify, confirm or even contradict (!) those in the parts. One slight oddity in the notation is the writing of passages for the 16' stop alone apparently at their sounding (ie not the playing) pitch. Players of instruments lacking a 16' stop (and the various other expressive devices exploited by GM) will have to find their own ways of getting round this and a few other issues (range, for example). Performance on four pianos should certainly not be ruled out. Players will also be amused to see the harpsichord manuals referred to as 'Great' and 'Swell'! All would-be performers are strongly urged to listen to the recording. They may well feel that, lacking 'instruments of the period', 16 hands on 4 pianos is worth trying to create the octave doublings. I can make the *Sibelius* files available to anyone wishing to create such a version.

Meanwhile, the search for the lost works by Thurston Dart and Raymond Leppard seems likely to prove unsuccessful, though if anyone thinks of somewhere I might not have looked do either let me know or have a look yourself!

George Malcolm was born in 1917 and his many admirers would like to think that his approaching centenary might bring about a balanced and comprehensive assessment of his achievements. Yes, he did sell his Shudi-Broadwood 1775 harpsichord and favoured the then modern instruments but he did make harpsichord repertoire mainstream listening, he took French baroque ornamentation more seriously than some do now, his achievements as a choirmaster at Westminster Cathedral are universally acknowledged and he was a rather more versatile conductor of orchestral music than is often realised. And what wouldn't any of us give for his technique and sense of musical architecture?

David Lord has lovingly constructed and continues to expand a website collecting together a mass of Malcolm-related material. See www.georgemalcolm.co.uk