

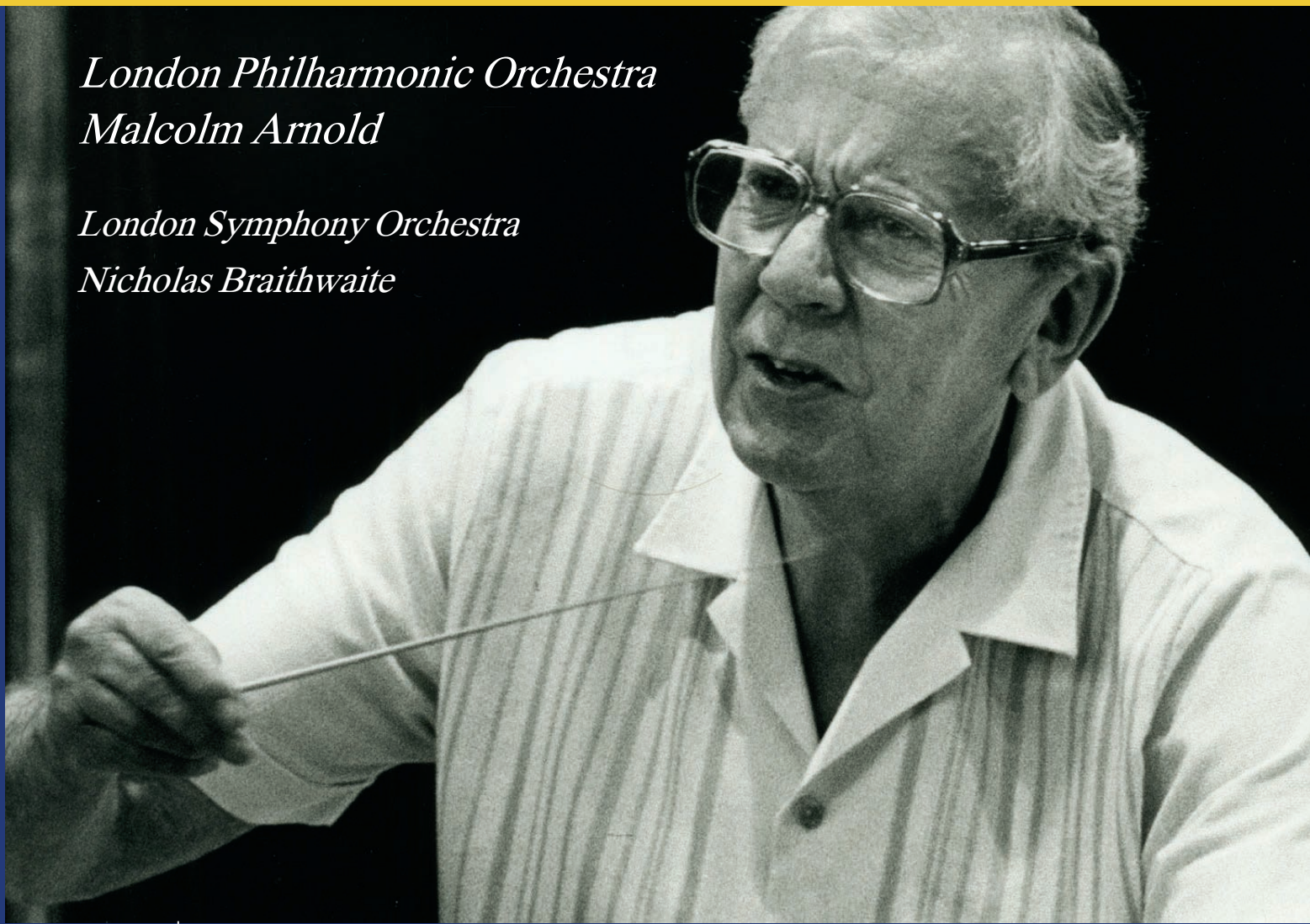
Malcolm Arnold

Lyrita

Overture Beckus the Dandipratt
English, Scottish, & Cornish Dances
Sinfonietta No. 1

London Philharmonic Orchestra
Malcolm Arnold

London Symphony Orchestra
Nicholas Braithwaite



Malcolm Arnold (1921–2006)

1	Comedy Overture: Beckus the Dandipratt *	7.52
	English Dances, Set 1, Op. 27	10.11
2	I Andantino	3.15
3	II Vivace	1.47
4	III Mesto	3.28
5	IV Allegro risoluto	1.41
	English Dances, Set 2, Op. 33	9.49
6	I Allegro non troppo	3.20
7	II Con brio	1.23
8	III Grazioso	2.30
9	IV Giubiloso	2.36
	Scottish Dances, Op. 59	10.33
10	I Pesante	2.39
11	II Vivace	2.21
12	III Allegretto	4.07
13	IV Con brio	1.26
	Cornish Dances, Op. 91	12.40
14	I Vivace	1.40
15	II Andantino	4.30
16	III Con moto e sempre parodia	3.24
17	IV Allegro ma non troppo	3.06
	Sinfonietta No. 1, Op.48 *	9.53
18	I Allegro comodo	2.48
19	II Allegretto	4.29
20	III Allegro con brio	2.36

Total playing time 60.58

London Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Malcolm Arnold

★ London Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Nicholas Braithwaite

This compilation is available as a high bit rate download only.
All of these recordings are also available in CD format on SRCD201 (The Dance Sets),
SRCD 257 (Sinfonietta), and SRCD 318 (Beckus the Dandipratt)

Malcolm Arnold began his career as an orchestral musician himself, making a brilliant impression as a player. In 1942, whilst still only 21, he was appointed principal trumpet of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and his experience in the brass section gave him an invaluable insight into the workings of a big symphony orchestra. There was a double irony in his war years; despite his exemption as a conscientious objector he decided to join the army, only to find himself playing cornet in a military band, after which he returned to orchestral playing and joined the BBC Symphony Orchestra for a time before returning to the LPO.

It was his own orchestra, the London Philharmonic, which gave him his first big break as a composer, the performance of his Overture *Beckus the Dandipratt* under Edward van Beinum in November 1947 and a subsequent recording by the same artists marked Arnold's arrival as a fresh new voice in post-war British music. Though entitled a 'Comedy Overture', Beckus displays far more psychological substance than this label would suggest. The 'dandipratt', an archaic name for 'urchin' is represented by two blithely droll themes, first heard on cornet and flute, respectively. These themes are ripe for development and suffer from a variety of distortions and transformations, as Beckus becomes the subject of a series of misadventures. Some episodes are playful, others more menacing, but in the end the dandipratt emerges from his ordeals unreformed and

apparently unscathed, preserved by his own inconsequence. Vividly scored and deftly constructed, Beckus is the work of a natural symphonist.

Arnold had already been composing for years and had won the Cobbett Composition Prize as a student at the Royal College of Music. His decisive move towards composition as a career came when one of his colleagues, who had been reading a book about the shortage of film composers, badgered him to send a score to the studios at Denham. At last Arnold sent one and he was immediately asked to do a film. This was to be the first of countless film scores, including *The Bridge on the River Kwai* which won him an Oscar and *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* which brought an Ivor Novello Award.

In his film writing Arnold developed an uncommonly keen sense of music's evocative power. His two sets of **English Dances** composed in the early 1950s when he was still earning acclaim as a young composer, use this skill to the full. He has created miniature mood pieces which have all the vitality of the dance, each one highlighting some aspect of the English folk idiom. The first is typical in its lilting 6/8 metre; its easy drift and light embellishments give it the character of an improvisation. The second dance is bustling and festive, the third mournful, yet both are constructed in a way frequently found in folk tunes. The bassoon melody which begins the third dance is particularly characteristic, its eight bar phrase consisting of a two bar unit repeated four times, each time slightly varied. The unit itself is recognised by three essentially English features. First its opening rhythm, weak-strong, is one of the characteristic speech rhythms of the English language itself. Second, its initial melodic interval of a rising fourth, dominant to tonic, is one which begins about half the tunes in one famous collection of English folksongs. Third, the melody moves predominantly by step with occasional thirds, winding round and round like the English country road. In the fourth dance, too, the melodic shape is similar, but rhythmically it begins emphatically on a downbeat.

The fifth dance recalls the sound of the pipe and tabor. In this arrangement the dance is played by a piccolo and a side drum because modern symphony orchestras do not normally carry players accustomed to fingering a simple pipe with the left hand whilst

striking a small drum slung from the shoulder with the right! The sixth dance, like the first, is in 6/8 metre, but its mood is more lively; like all these dances, it never tires of repeating a good tune. The seventh is graceful, its wistfulness enhanced by the flat leading-note of its modal scale. The final dance is clearly a celebration, its melody strengthened by prominent use of the tonic and dominant as pivotal points. Thus each dance has its own clearly defined character yet each has also a timeless quality, as if Arnold had created a pageant of the English people in which each movement encapsulates a span of centuries. Deliberately evocative melodies and instrumental timbres are set in a harmonic style which is often acerbic in an uncompromisingly twentieth-century way, giving the music a tension which lends depth to the simple melodies which form the basis of each movement.

There is no old Gaelic word for "dancing", yet it is difficult now to imagine a time when there was no Scottish country dancing. The **Four Scottish Dances**, composed for the BBC Light Music Festival in 1957, capture the atmosphere of the Highlands from the very first bar, a bagpipe drone (imitated by trombones) accompanying a melody which has the characteristic slow pace and Scotch-snap rhythm of the strathspey. The reel, which is the other great national dance of Scotland, inspires the second dance. The reel is like the strathspey in many respects but its rhythm is smoother and its tempo faster. In Arnold's dance the excitement increases as the melody is repeated time and again, gradually rising in pitch. The bassoonist seems to be drunk, however, for when his solo comes he can only play the tune at less than half speed and he lurches from note to note. The third dance features a lilting pentatonic melody in which the Scotch-snap rhythm appears in gentler mood. The sound of the fiddle pervades the final dance which is the most vigorous of them all and must surely be a Highland Fling.

The **Four Cornish Dances** were first performed at a Promenade Concert in 1966 with Arnold conducting his former colleagues of the LPO. Arnold believed that this kind of contact with the performers was vital for a composer and he was always prepared to listen to their ideas, wryly remarking that although sometimes insulting they will always be highly illuminating. His own conducting was unorthodox; as one critic would have

it, "he flags his signals like an impatient tic-tac man". He put conducting down in *Who's Who* as a 'recreation' but he later changed his mind, coming to regard it as more of a disease. "No such unhealthy occupation should ever be a recreation. It brings out the worst in people, wanting to dominate..."

Arnold lived very happily in Cornwall for a number of years, living with his wife and young son in a house which was once a row of three labourers' cottages; his Cornish-English Dictionary testified to a more than passing interest in the people and their folklore. His visiting-card proudly bore the title Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd and Arnold was quick to point out that it was this title which appeared in full; his other honours, CBE, Hon Mus D and Hon RAM, being represented only by their initials.

Arnold saw in the Cornish people a highly developed sense of humour. Many are sea-faring folk, and all have been brought up to a tradition of fierce independence. Yet despite these qualities Arnold believed that the Cornish had been ruthlessly exploited, the deserted engine houses of the tin and copper mines bearing silent witness to this, their ruins radiating a strange and sad beauty. This landscape is the setting for male voice choirs, brass bands, methodism, May Days, and Moody and Sankey hymns, and Arnold hoped that some of these things were present in these Dances, which are Cornish through the eyes of a 'furrener'.

The Sinfonietta No.1, Op.48 appeared in 1955 and is scored for two oboes, two horns and string orchestra. Its textures are clear, its melodic invention is written gratefully for the instruments, and its layout could hardly be clearer. Two quick movements flank a slower middle movement of a reflective character, and tinged with flashes of melancholy rapidly dispelled by the scatter-brained finale.

MARGARET ARCHIBALD
with additions by PAUL CONWAY and ROBERT LAYTON

*Tracks 1 & 18-20 recorded at Watford Town Hall 6 September 1978
Record Producer Tom Mowrey Recording Engineer John Dunkerley*

*All other tracks recorded at Walthamstow Assembly Hall 12 January 1977
Record Producer John Walker Recording Engineer John Dunkerley*

Digital remastering by Mike Clements

The photos of Malcolm Arnold were specially taken for Lyrita by CLIVE BARDA

*Also available on Lyrita
MALCOLM ARNOLD Symphony No. 4 Op.71 LPO/ARNOLD.....SRCD200*

© 1979 * © 1982 Lyrita Recorded Edition, England. This compilation © & © 2019 Lyrita Recorded Edition, England. Lyrita is a registered trade mark. Made in the UK. LYRITA RECORDED EDITION. Produced under an exclusive licence from Lyrita by Wyastone Estate Ltd, Monmouth, NP25 3SR, UK

www.lyrita.co.uk

