

BMC 6 - WILLIAM CROFT (1678-1727) - *Two Sonatas for Violin and Continuo* (1700)
& **WILLIAM BOYCE** (1710-1779) - *3 Symphonies, Op. 2 in 8 Parts & 3 Trio Sonatas*

With fifty some years between them yet sharing a remarkably similar musical background, the two composers represented on this disc span a wide range of English music. The first half of the 18th century was a prosperous time for England, and for London especially, expressing itself among other ways in the form of private and public music-making, in homes, theatres and public gardens.

Born in 1678, **William Croft** was a chorister at the Chapel Royal under John Blow, who exerted a very strong influence over all composers of this period from Purcell forwards; most of them passed through his hands at the Chapel Royal. At the age of twenty-two Croft became Organist of St. Anne's, Soho, and in the same year became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal.

A year later he became joint Organist of the Chapel Royal with Jeremiah Clarke, assuming sole responsibility in 1707 on the death of Clarke. In 1708 he succeeded his master, John Blow, as Organist of Westminster Abbey and Master of the Children and Composer to the Chapel Royal, retaining these positions until his death in 1727. He was buried in Westminster Abbey in the north aisle, where his monument can still be seen. Croft is perhaps best remembered today for his church music; several of his hymn tunes are still in use today, and some of his anthems can be found on cathedral service lists. In fact he is remembered almost exclusively as a composer of church music.

The **Violin Sonatas** were published in 1700 by John Walsh in a volume entitled: '*Six Sonatas or Solos, Three for a Violin and Three for the Flute, with a Thorough Bass for the Harpsichord, Theorboe or Bass-Viol. Composed by Mr. Wm. Crofts and an Italian Mr.*' The three Flute Sonatas are presumably by the Italian Mr.', but the Violin Sonatas are all ascribed specifically to Croft. They are, in fact some of the earliest examples of English sonatas for solo violin. Both Sonatas recorded here conform to the same order of movements; an *Adagio* opening followed by an *Allegro*, then a slow movement followed by a *Gigue*. In the G minor Sonata the slow movement is only seven bars in length and is joined on to its preceding *Allegro*.



William Boyce

Born in the City of London in 1711, William Boyce was a chorister at St. Paul's Cathedral, then an articled pupil of the Organist there, Maurice Greene; he was Organist at leading London churches and eventually at the Chapel Royal, where he was to become Master of the King's Musick. Boyce's compositions include English Operas, Odes (many of whose overtures have acquired separate fame as symphonies), Anthems, Services, Songs, Organ Voluntaries, a few Concertos and 11 Trio-Sonatas. He also edited an important collection of cathedral music.

Everyone who knew Boyce liked and admired him. "*He was endowed with the qualities of truth, justice, and integrity, was mild and gentle in deportment*", said the historian Sir John Hawkins. "*A more modest man I have never known; I never heard him speak a vain or ill-natured word, either to exalt himself or depreciate another*", said the Revd. Charles Wesley.

William Boyce published his **12 Trio-Sonatas** in 1747. By that time the *Trio-Sonata* form had almost become extinct on the European continent; but in England it enjoyed an Indian Summer, around the middle of the century, partly due to the flourishing state of amateur music-making. Published as *Twelve Sonatas for Two Violins; with a Bass for the Violoncello or Harpsichord*, these Trio Sonatas were immensely popular.

Burney tells us that they were: "*longer and more generally purchased, performed, and admired, than any productions of the kind in this kingdom, except those of Corelli. They were not only in constant use, as chamber Music, in private concerts, for which they were originally designed, but in our theatres, as act-tunes, and our gardens, as favourite pieces, during many years.*"

Published by subscription, the first offering was rapidly sold out to private buyers and music-sellers, as well as the proprietors of the Covent Garden and Drury Lane Theatres and of the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens and many musical societies in London, Dublin, New York and Philadelphia. Leading musicians subscribed, including Arne, Handel, and Pepusch. The Subscription Edition, it seems, sold out at once, for another without subscribers' list was issued later in 1747, and a further edition, undated, appeared later.

Trio Sonata No. 2 in F Major. Andante Vivace / Adagio / Allegro / Allegro ma non troppo

The first movement's seemingly curious tempo marking is not self-contradictory; '*Vivace*' was an indication of moderate tempo in Boyce's time, and what is meant is simply an *Andante* which doesn't go to sleep. It has smooth, flowing semi-quavers, with the violins initially imitating each other's long phrases, later mainly in mellifluous thirds and sixths. After a brief *Adagio* comes a cheerful fast movement, with some quirkily angular phrases and a characteristically easygoing kind of counterpoint. Finally a *jig* (though not so marked), straightforwardly and sturdily tuneful apart from some echo-like effects near the end.

Trio Sonata No. 8 in E-flat Major. Largo / Allegro / Siciliana / Tempo di Minuetto: Allegro

The first movement is of broadly the same kind as that of Trio No. 2: flowing semiquaver motion, with a certain amount of imitation (rather closer here), but also with some Corellian suspensions. A sprightly *Allegro* follows, with light, neatly dovetailed imitative writing. Next a somber *Siciliana* - a movement which evidently gave Boyce some trouble, for an earlier manuscript of the Sonatas shows a largely different version. The Trio Sonata ends with a brisk minuet.

Trio Sonata No. 12 in G Major. Moderato / Tempo di Gavotta - Dolce

The first movement is grandly spacious, both in the nature of its invention and the scale of its structure; in style it blends noble melody and direct counterpoint, with a touch of toccata-like brilliance in the violins and a strong sense of harmonic logic (which largely derives from the bass line with its striding scales). At its climax comes an unexpected chromatic development of the main theme; and there is an effective epigrammatic ending. The sonata closes with a lively *bourrée*, a minor-key trio, in triple time, marked simply '*Dolce*'.

During the 1740s Boyce became involved with the theater. He later abandoned the theater, in 1760, the year in which his Eight Symphonies were published. The link between these two facets of his life can be found in the Symphonies themselves, the movements of which are drawn largely from opera overtures and incidental music.

The Symphonies were published in London by John Walsh entitled: "*Eight Symphonies in Eight parts. Six for Violins, Hoboys or German Flutes, and two for Violins, French Horns and Trumpets, with a Bass for the Violoncello and Harpsichord. Opera secunda*". The words *Opera secunda* suggest that they may have previously existed, perhaps available on a limited scale in manuscript form. Internal musical analysis is largely superfluous in these light and varied works, clearly intended for entertainment in the popular London Pleasure Gardens of Vauxhall and Ranelagh, as well as for performance by the many musical societies which had grown up during the middle years of Eighteenth Century London.