
Copland & Finzi *Clarinet Concertos*
Annelien Van Wauwe
BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
NICOLÒ UMBERTO FORON



COPLAND & FINZI: CLARINET CONCERTOS

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

Clarinet Concerto (1947–48)

1	I. Slowly and expressively – Cadenza	8. 53
2	II. Rather fast	8. 15

Gerald Finzi (1901–1956)

Clarinet Concerto, Op. 31 (1948–49)

3	I. Allegro vigoroso	7. 04
4	II. Adagio ma senza rigore	10. 02
5	III. Allegro giocoso	7. 58

Total playing time: 42. 15

Annelien Van Wauwe, clarinet

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
conducted by **Nicolò Umberto Foron**



Recorded at City Halls in Glasgow, this album brings together two cornerstone works of the clarinet repertoire: Aaron Copland's Clarinet Concerto and Gerald Finzi's Clarinet Concerto, performed with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Nicolò Umberto Foron.

My relationship with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra goes back many years and includes important milestones in my artistic life. One of my first major projects with them was Finzi's Clarinet Concerto, during my time as a BBC New Generation Artist under the guidance of Sir James MacMillan. This was followed by further collaborations, including Mozart's Clarinet Concerto at the BBC Proms, the world premiere of Wim Henderickx's basset clarinet concerto, and several subsequent projects.

Over time, the BBC SSO has become one of my favourite orchestras to work with. From the very first note I ever played in the City Halls, I felt an immediate connection to the acoustic, the atmosphere, and the musicians' openness, which made it clear that they would be the ideal partner for this recording.

Although composed within only a year of each other, these two concertos inhabit entirely different sound worlds. Finzi's is intimate, lyrical, and deeply introspective, shaped by the English pastoral tradition and a post-war sense of reflection. Copland's is expansive, rhythmic, and unmistakably American in character, infused with jazz influences and a spirit of openness and freedom.

As a performer, I am drawn to this contrast. Finzi asks for breath, line, and nuance; Copland asks for clarity, character, and rhythmic vitality. Moving between these worlds feels like shifting between two distinct musical languages—both deeply human, both equally direct.

My aim in these recordings is to remain as close as possible to the essence of both composers' intentions, shaped by detailed preparation and a strong sense of artistic honesty. At its core, this project is about trust, continuity, and the joy of making music. Thank you, BBC SSO.

I could not have imagined a more perfect sound engineer than Rita Hermeyer, who is also a clarinettist and whom I first met during my previous PENTATONE recording with the NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover. She consistently manages to capture on record exactly what I hear and feel when I play. Dankeschön.

Working with Nicolò Foron has been a real inspiration throughout this project: a fresh, highly energetic breeze in Copland, and the most mature, respectful, and emotionally intense approach in Finzi. Grazie mille, Nicolò.

I sincerely hope that Finzi's Clarinet Concerto will, over time, become as widely known and performed as Copland's, and that it will take its rightful place on concert stages. I have invested all my energy, inspiration, and motivation into making this album, and I am very much looking forward to sharing it with you now, dear reader.

Annelien Van Wauwe



I have long been fascinated and inspired by the work of Annelien Van Wauwe. To have the opportunity to collaborate with her and the exceptional BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, to shape music together, and to explore the depth of Copland and Finzi has been a true joy. For the clarinet repertoire, these two pieces represent core benchmarks:

Copland's concerto, with its jazz-inflected rhythms, wide-open American lyricism, and rhythmic vitality, and Finzi's concerto, with its deeply introspective, elegiac character and characteristic English pastoral warmth. You can hear Annelien Van Wauwe's strong artistic vision and sensitivity come to life in her playing in these masterworks, which are both distinctly different and yet share notable similarities. While both pieces were written in 1948, they stem from very different musical inspirations.

I have known Annelien for a long time, and for me this project represents not only an artistic collaboration but also a human connection that has developed over time and now finds a meaningful continuation. Working with her and the BBC SSO was both a joyful and a spiritual exploration.

Nicolò Umberto Foron

Completed just a year apart in the aftermath of the Second World War, the clarinet concertos of Aaron Copland (1900–1990) and Gerald Finzi (1901–1956) offer strikingly different responses to the same historical moment, while also bearing the unmistakable stamp of their composers. Copland's dynamic work was written during a hugely prolific and successful period for the composer and is imbued with the confidence of post-war America; Finzi's, by contrast, is introspective and elegiac, capturing the pensive quality that pervades much of his output and something of a Britain still in recovery. Neither composer was a clarinettist – Copland joked he couldn't play a note – and each work was written for a specific player.

Copland's Concerto owes its existence to clarinettist and bandleader Benny Goodman (1909–1986), who by the late 1930s was seeking challenges beyond jazz. As well as performing and recording standard clarinet repertoire he began commissioning new works from leading composers, with Bartók, Hindemith, and Poulenc among them. In the mid-1940s he approached Copland, who also had an offer from jazz clarinettist Woody Herman, but chose Goodman: 'I had long been an admirer,' he remembered, 'and I thought that writing a concerto with him in mind would give me a fresh point of view.' Copland started by listening to Goodman's recordings and then began work during a 1947 South American tour, completing the score and sending it to Goodman the following autumn. The composer received a curious thank you note in return: 'With a little editing I know we will have a good piece'. It transpired Goodman considered parts of the cadenza and coda excessively high 'for all normal purposes', and so Copland revised the score. Still, the original manuscript bears the amusing, if barbed, annotation: 'too difficult for Benny Goodman'.

It was then two years before the work was heard as Goodman navigated illness and other commitments while Copland tried to secure a performance. Eventually, Goodman gave the premiere as a radio broadcast on 6 November 1950 with the NBC Symphony conducted by Fritz Reiner. A concert performance followed with soloist Ralph McLane, but reviews were mixed, and it was largely the performances and recordings of Goodman and Copland that secured its place in the repertory.

Copland opted for a two-movement structure (slow–fast) and restricted his orchestral palette to strings, harp, and piano. The romantic first movement, in ABA form, has its origins in a sketch for a pas de deux – a connection hinting at the intimate and tender quality Copland thought would 'make everyone weep'. Marked 'Slowly and expressively', a supple and lyrical clarinet theme unfolds over pared-back strings, as characteristic Copland harmonies – open and spare – combine with a steady sense of pulse to create a sense of space and calm. Defined by long, generous melodic lines and expressive leaps, composer-critic Vincent Persichetti captured the movement's serenity in an early review: 'Only music as simple and beautiful as this satin prelude could linger so long without the stimulus of opposing melodic ideas and generating rhythms.'

There follows a virtuosic cadenza, with the soloist leading the transition into the free-wheeling jazz-inflected exuberance of the second movement. Memorably described by clarinettist Richard Stoltzman as requiring the instrument to shift 'from classic chalumeau to liquorice stick', Copland uses the cadenza to introduce ideas developed later – an approach also found in his earlier Piano Concerto (1927). As the energy builds, the orchestra arrives, launching the 'free form rondo' – Copland's description – with a spiky little introduction. The clarinet, nimble and



lithe, takes over and the finale proceeds through a series of rhythmically daring and often bold sections. Packed with references to jazz and South American music, the clarinet puts on an acrobatic display as cascades of runs one moment are followed by audacious swing gestures the next. The orchestra even becomes a makeshift rhythm section, complete with slap bass, as the movement is propelled forward by its rhythmic verve. Familiar melodic fragments return as it reaches an exhilarating conclusion marked by a raucous glissando – a fitting gesture for Goodman, the 'King of Swing'.

As Copland was putting the finishing touches to his Concerto on one side of the Atlantic, **Finzi's Concerto** was about to take shape on the other. Its initial catalyst was clarinettist Pauline Juler (1914–2003), for whom he had written his *Five Bagatelles* (1938–41). Shortly after the premiere in 1943, he 'half promised' to compose her a concerto and when the committee of the Three Choirs Festival offered a commission later that year, the composer saw his opportunity. Juler had a remarkable career: her playing of the *Bagatelles* inspired York Bowen (1884–61) to write his 1943 Clarinet Sonata for her, and she had given the premiere of Howard Ferguson's *Four Short Pieces*, Op. 6 in 1937. She would not ultimately perform Finzi's Concerto, however. In 1948, she got married and stepped back from professional playing to dedicate herself to family life, with Finzi seeking a new potential soloist.

By October 1948, the composer had approached Frederick 'Jack' Thurston (1901–53). Thurston had collaborated with many of the leading British composers of the day and was pleased at the prospect of working with the writer of the *Bagatelles*. As Finzi made progress he sent Thurston movements for comment, but unlike Goodman, Thurston rarely requested changes, believing passages

difficult for him would not trouble future players. The Concerto received its premiere on 9 September 1949 at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford with Thurston as soloist and Finzi conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. The composer later paid tribute to the clarinettist's contribution, writing that 'all the care & trouble you took over the work was the making of it.'

In a programme note, Finzi acknowledged how the Concerto 'grew out of the warmth and romantic qualities' as well as the 'natural fluidity' of the clarinet. Across three-movements, and with only strings as accompaniment, he revels in the lyrical and vocal-like nature of the clarinet, an approach perhaps unsurprising given he is a composer so closely associated with song. Stylistically there are nods to Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and others, but for all the assumptions around Finzi representing a certain branch of English pastoralism, it is not always a sunny idyll that emerges.

Biographers have often connected the underlying disquiet in his music to him losing his father, all three of his brothers, and an important musical mentor, Ernest Farrar, before his eighteenth birthday.

The Concerto certainly has moments of turmoil. This is evident in the big, brooding, and decidedly dissonant orchestral statement that opens the *Allegro vigoroso* and introduces the prominent octave motif – and C minor tonality – that informs what follows. The clarinet's entry softens the mood with an expressive first theme, complete with octave leap, that is reminiscent of Walton's Violin Concerto (1938–39). As the exposition proceeds, the clarinet continues to spin long almost velvety lines, often in dialogue with the strings – though a sense of unease is present in the chromatic inflections and shifting harmonies that colour the work. Ideas seem to arise organically, with moments of emotional intensity occasionally bursting forth from soloist and orchestra as the movement progresses through the development into final restatements. A short cadenza, added after the premiere at the suggestion of Vaughan Williams, provides a brief interlude ahead of a forceful and emphatic conclusion mirroring the opening.

At the heart of the Concerto is the expansive *Adagio*. It demands exceptional control from the soloist and grows into a sustained meditation in which the clarinet, supported by sensitive string writing, alternates between tenderness, lament, and declamation. Anchored by recurring thematic ideas, passages that are measured and deliberate give way to those that are rich and passionate – though stillness eventually prevails and the movement draws to a peaceful close in F major.

The work closes with a *Rondo* finale that provides welcome contrast. Where Copland's concluding rondo was a virtuosic and somewhat dizzying display, Finzi delights with a cheerful athletic romp built around a bright C major theme he first sketched in the 1930s. Earlier ideas return, but the prevailing atmosphere stems from the rhythmic bounce of the principal theme. As such, while Finzi's Concerto overall has an air of reflection and even melancholy, it concludes with optimism and hope.

Sophie Redfern



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