

From 9 to 11 September, I had an amazing three days working with pianist Anthony Hewitt, violinist Jeffrey Armstrong and producer Raphaël Mouterde, for my first personal album with Naxos Records Label. This CD will include many short pieces by York Bowen like the Melodies and Romances, Allegro De Concert, unpublished Three Duos for violin and viola, and a not very often-heard big late work - Rhapsody for viola & piano. Alongside, there is Britten's Waltz and Holst's Duo and Easy Pieces.

The process of a recording project is pretty simple: set-up, record plus listening, adjust, and finish, at some point. Although in real life it's a little more complicated. We decided to start with the Three Duos for violin and viola, as that is the only piece with violin, and the rest are all with piano.

When Jeffrey and I arrived at the Bradshaw Hall at 11 am, the microphones were already set up on stage. We met Raphaël and then quickly unpacked our instruments and rehearsed while he adjusted the set-up and balance accordingly. For the project, I was playing on an old instrument, which used to belong to the South African violist Cecil Aronowitz. It was generously lent to me by my dear teacher Louise Lansdown. Jeffrey was playing on a Peter Greiner violin, which is famous for being projecting and this one has a round body to the sound that reminds me of the viola sound.

Amusingly, after Raphaël stood from where the microphones are positioned hearing with his own ears, he told us that he could hear a lot of viola but not enough violin!

Raphaël's way of doing a recording it is that he would always let us record a full take of the movement so we have a great structure and energy to the music and when we come to listen to it, we can see if there's any interpretation/balance issues that we hear and want to change; then we go back and break the music into big sections – so we still hold a good direction of the whole; and then, should there be small flaws in certain passages, we would record two or three phrases aiming to get them sorted (and sometimes if we did well, Raphaël would let us carry on and we could even cover up multiple places in one go!).

The Three Duos are pretty short, about six minutes in total, although we spent nearly three hours on them, and that made the schedule a little tight. So after a brief sandwich lunch we reset the stage and microphones, and quickly started to record the music with piano.

We eventually called it a day at 20:30 and sort of caught up the schedule a bit, but it was still not ideal. Therefore on the next day we decided to start earlier, from 9:30 am (any earlier than that would be quite uncivilised for me). By the time we finished at 8 pm, we made up the backlog and already had done most of the music except for the Bowen Rhapsody and Holst Duo. Necessarily, we went out for a drink afterwards, of course.

In the past two days, there weren't any major disagreements in any sort of ways. Although when it comes to the big piece Rhapsody, at one point I was against both Tony and Raphaël regarding an interpretation of a transitional passage. It is the passage right before the second slow-ish, much-calmer-in-comparison passage, for me it feels like the two parts are passing around a vivid conversation, and the articulation should be more sharpened and exciting at the beginning, then needs to be gradually flattened with the *diminuendo* and *rallentando* towards the end of it; but they were thinking it in a longer-phrase sense, almost like a big balloon slowly getting rid of the air, so the two parts should be more like one and the start of it should already be like a resolution to the previous passage. I was really not convinced then because I was so used to my interpretation. The disagreed tension from me became really intense after a while... but another half of me also kept telling me that I should try their interpretation and find a way to do it. So in the end I agreed to do it and Raphaël told us that we got a good take of it. Although I still think mine is better, but considering the writing of slurs and big *diminuendo* hairpins in the piano part, I guess they had a good point. Recording Holst was all very smooth, thanks to the spacious thinly-textured writing, so we could express ourselves freely individually, especially in the 2nd movement. After three days of long recording sessions, we were all super-tired towards the end. Eventually, we called an end at 7 pm on the last day of this big project.

Just saying thank you is far from enough, but to Tony and Jeffrey for their great virtuosity of playing and professionalism, and especially Raphaël who were so patient and clear and amazing, that he could pick out all the very little issues, some that I only could tell if I listen back many times so carefully. And that he still needed to come down to pack all the microphones and cables after we finished and drive back to London afterwards. My gratitude also goes to all the way from my teacher Louise Lansdown and soon-to-be teacher Thomas Riebl who both gave me lots of inspiration towards these music, to Julian Lloyd Webber without whom I wouldn't have been offered this amazing opportunity, and to Mika and Yuxin who were page turning, Toby who gave me useful suggestions during the sessions where he was present for the entire 2nd and 3rd days. And also heartfelt thanks to many of my friends and other teachers for their great support and instructions, and specially to you for reading. Please come back to check the release of the CD in **2020!** 😊

Yue Yu

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