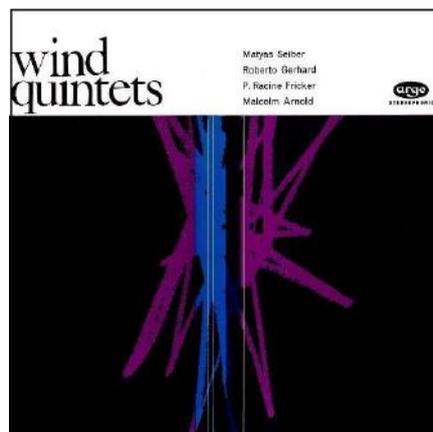


Roberto Gerhard's Wind Quintet – An Early Recording

by John France

As far as I can tell, the first commercial recording of a piece of music by Roberto Gerhard (1896-1970) was his arrangement of Three Pieces by Franz Schubert. These were the 'Rondo' from the Piano Sonata in D, D.850, the 'Marche Militaire' No.1 in D major, D.733 and the 'Marche Caractéristique' No.1 in C Major, D.886. These had been transcribed for small orchestra, around 1943 and used as incidental music for the radio play *Cristobal Colón* by Salvador de Madariaga during 1943. They were performed on the LP by Leslie Bridgewater and the Westminster Light Orchestra (WLP 4006/Nix WLP6806). Also included on this album were the 'Valse Caprice', and the 'Entr'acte and Ballet Music' from *Rosamunde*, D.797, 'Two Galops' and the hackneyed 'Ave Maria' in a transcription by Max Saunders. The reviewer (I.C.) of this album in *The Gramophone* (July 1954, p.62) noted that the Gerhard arrangements were 'captivating in their light-hearted gaiety'. This compared to the 'lugubriously thick scoring of Ave Maria'.



The November 1962 edition of the *Musical Times* (p.749) carried an advert for a new LP of wind music featuring works by Mátyás Seiber, Peter Racine Fricker, Malcolm Arnold and Roberto Gerhard. The performers were billed simply as the London Wind Quintet. It was stated that the record was made in association with The British Council. Both monoaural and stereo versions were available on RG 326 and ZRG 5326 respectively.

The works on this album were Mátyás Seiber's *Permutazioni a cinque* (1958), Roberto Gerhard's *Wind Quintet* (1928), Peter Racine Fricker's *Wind Quintet* (1947) and Malcolm Arnold's irrepressible *Three Shanties* for wind quintet (1952). The performers were Gareth Morris, flute; Sidney Sutcliffe (oboe), Bernard Walton (clarinet), Gwydion Brooke (bassoon) and Alan Civil (horn). The recording had been made at the West Hampstead Studio 3 in London, during February 1962. The producer was Andrew Raeburn and the engineer Arthur Lilley.

Malcolm Arnold and Peter Racine Fricker were both British-born composers, Mátyás Seiber hailed from Hungary and Roberto Gerhard from Catalonia. Both Gerhard and Seiber had come to the United Kingdom as refugees from the Spanish Civil War and German persecution in the run up to World War II, respectively.

Roberto Gerhard's *Wind Quintet* was completed in 1928, after he had concluded a period of study with Arnold Schoenberg in Berlin and Vienna. Despite his absorption of the Viennese master's serial technique, Gerhard never lost his connection with the folk music of his native Catalonia. This is not a 'weighty essay' in the medium akin to Schoenberg's *Wind Quintet* completed in 1924, although it did utilise elements of serial technique learnt from his teacher. Interestingly, Gerhard uses a tone-row with only seven notes, (B-E-D-C-Bb-D#-F#); this is of crucial (though not as in Schoenberg, exclusive) importance.

The formal construct of this four movement Quintet does follow Schoenberg's 'process of continuous variation' but Gerhard has allowed individual sections to utilise various traditional compositional devices such as 'alternating contrapuntal passages with homophonic textures'. The listener will be

aware of a strong Spanish flavour to this piece. Certainly, Iberian folk music may not be quoted directly, but its ethos is never far away. The Quintet is scored for flute (doubling piccolo), oboe, clarinet in Bb, bassoon, and horn in F.

The work was premiered during an all Gerhard concert in Palau de la Música Catalana, Barcelona on 22 December 1929. The instrumentalists in the Quintet were Esteve Gratacós (flute), Cassià Carles (oboe), Joan Vives (clarinet), Anton Goxens (bassoon) and Ramon Bonell (horn). The ensemble was conducted by the composer. Other works that evening included Gerhard's Concertino (1927–8), *7 Hai-kai du Amour et Paysage* (1923), eight songs from *Cançons populars catalanes* (1928) and Two Sardanas (1929).

The Wind Quintet was dedicated to Gerhard's friend and patron Dr Alice Isabella Roughton (1905-1995), who was 'a psychiatrist, a medical campaigner, a pioneer in the movement against nuclear weapons and a conservationist' and had provided financial support and accommodation to Roberto and his wife, Poldi, when they arrived in Cambridge. The dedication was clearly added when the score was published in 1960 by Mills Music Ltd.

Various detailed technical analyses of the Wind Quintet include:

1. *The London Sinfonietta: The Complete Instrumental and Choral Music of Arnold Schoenberg and Roberto Gerhard*: Programme Book, 1973, p.78
2. Nash, Peter Paul, "The Wind Quintet" *Tempo* 139 December 1981 p.5-11
3. Mitchell, Rachel Elice, *An Examination of the Integration of Serial Procedures and Folkloric Elements in the Music of Roberto Gerhard*, D diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2009.
4. Perry, Mark E., *Un Català Mundial: Catalan Nationalism and The Early Works of Roberto Gerhard* (University of Kansas, 2013, p.135-6)
5. Walshaw, Trevor Stansfield, *Roberto Gerhard: explorer and synthesist*. Doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield 2013 p.70ff)
6. Tomás, Diego Alonso, *La creación musical de Roberto Gerhard durante el magisterio de Arnold Schoenberg: neoclasicismo, octatonismo y organización proto-serial (1923-1928)* Tesis Doctoral Universidad de la Rioja, 2015 (passim)

For a comprehensive, non-technical discussion of the Peter Racine Fricker Wind Quintet, see France, John, *Peter Racine Fricker: Wind Quintet, op.5: A Forgotten Delight* [Part I](#) and [Part II](#). *British Classical Music: The Land of Lost Content*, May 2016.

The Gramophone (February 1963 p.391/2) review considered that 'the two major works, the Gerhard and the Fricker...must command the greatest attention.' Malcolm McDonald notes that the Gerhard Quintet had some 'borrowings' from serialism. In fact, it was 'early in the field' in 1928. The first acknowledged wholly serial work is usually regarded as Schoenberg's Suite for Piano, op.25 (1921-23). MacDonald believes that 'there is room for humanity, beauty even, in [Gerhard's] music. Throughout the four movements 'there is time for some considerable contrast of texture, and the resources of [instrumental] combination are shown at something like their widest.' In conclusion, MacDonald thought that 'all this excellent music is played to something like perfection by the London Wind Quintet, noticeable even among first-class wind combinations for uniformity of ideas about vibrato and, partly consequentially, for blend and balance. In both mono and stereo versions, the recorded sound is very good indeed.'

There was a major review of this LP in *High Fidelity* (August 1964, p.88). Eric Salzman begins by expressing the wish that 'someday an enterprising composer will write a piece for woodwind quintet without using the inevitable repeated note, two sixteenths-and-an-eighth figure from the famous Hindemith *Kleine Kammermusik*.' That said, Salzman insists that on this record 'we have a set of good wind works from Great Britain, all of which use the figure (Hindemith's!) in one form or another but in very different contexts.' Turning to the Gerhard Wind Quintet, he sets the work in its context of being

composed after study with Schoenberg. Salzman notes that 'although it contains chromatic and twelve-tone elements [it] is basically more conventionally thematic and full of tonal references...' He notes the Hindemithian rhythmic pattern as being 'omni-present' in this work. The exception being the 'Bach-Arioso slow movement'. Certainly, examining the score does reveal a good use of this figure, but maybe not quite as insistent as this reviewer contends.

In overview, Salzman is surprised that the two younger men, Fricker (b.1920) and Arnold (b.1921), are 'far more conservative' in style than the elder Gerhard (b.1896) and Seiber (b.1905).

Raymond Ericson, critiquing this LP for *The New York Times* (24 May 1964, p.X18) reminds the listener that Gerhard's Quintet is influenced by Schoenberg and Catalonia. A key observation is that despite using a tone row, he gives the resulting 'melodies' a 'rhythmic definition that many dodecaphonists avoid like the plague'. And surprisingly, the 'Quintet moves...toward a feeling of tonality by the time it is over.' Ericson concludes by suggesting 'the work has its overly formal moments, but it has much piquancy and charm, too.'

London Wind Quintet's recording of Roberto Gerhard's Wind Quintet has been uploaded to YouTube ([Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)) A live performance of the work made at the Auditorio Manuel de Falla in Granada, Spain is also on [YouTube](#). This recording was made on 14 January 2018. The players form the Quinteto de viento de la OCG (Orquesta Ciudad de Granada). (All Accessed 31 August 2020.)

A new commercial recording of Gerhard's Wind Quintet is long overdue. At the very least, a reissue of the London Wind Quintet's remarkable 1962 album is required.

John France