

Chamber Music of
William Busch

Lyrita

Michael Trainor, violin Zahra Benyounes, viola
Jessie Ann Richardson, cello Ashok Klouda, cello
Simon Callaghan, piano



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WILLIAM BUSCH (1901-1945)

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	Three pieces for violin and piano (1943-44)	11:57
1	I Cantilena Larghetto con molto espressione	3:30
2	II Caprice Molto vivace, leggiero e ritmico	2:56
3	III Lacrimosa Andante con molto espressione	5:31
4	Passacaglia for violin and viola (1939) Allegro con brio, energico	7:15
5	A Memory for violoncello and piano (1944) Lento, molto espressivo	3:22

	Quartet for piano and strings (1939)	31:08
6	I Allegro con brio	10:23
7	II Largo, molto cantabile ed espressivo	6:35
8	III Molto vivace ed energico	7:12
9	IV Andante non troppo, con solennita	6:58
	Suite for cello and piano* (1943)	14:18
10	I Prelude	
	Grave, risoluto e con intensità	4:37
11	II Capriccio	
	Allegro giocoso	3:51
12	III Nocturne	
	Adagio, molto tranquillo ma con espressione	3:12
13	IV Tarantella	
	Presto, con ferocità	2:38
14	Elegy for violoncello and piano* (1944)	
	Adagio, molto sostenuto	6:40

Total playing time 74:51

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Produced by Adrian Farmer Edited by Simon Callaghan

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In his obituary of William Busch, the writer and broadcaster John Amis observed that 'his music is distinguished by its sensibility and warmth with a strong sense of form and a fine texture, linear rather than harmonic. It is tragic that he should have died when he was writing at the height of his powers and at a time when his gifts were beginning to receive recognition. Recognition will not cease now, for his work has permanent values'.¹ Over forty years later, in a six-part BBC Radio 3 series entitled 'Forgotten Reputations?', presented by Amis, he warned that 'Of all the musicians of the '30s and '40s ... William Busch is the most likely to be forgotten'.² The current release is the latest of several Lyrita recordings preserving an important part of his creative legacy and seeking to ensure his music lives on.

William Busch was born in North London on 25 June 1901 of naturalised German parents. He developed a passion for music and took piano lessons at an early age, though he harboured no ambitions of a professional career as a pianist until his teenage years. Musical studies with France Woodmansee and A. W. Lilienthal in America were followed by piano lessons with Leonid Kreutzer and harmony lessons with Hugo Leichtentritt in Berlin. In May 1924, he returned to London, where he took piano lessons from Benno Moiseiwitsch and composition lessons with such leading British composers as Alan Bush, John Ireland and Bernard van Dieren. Bush became a close friend as well as a teacher, and William also enjoyed the friendship of the composers Gerald Finzi and Howard Ferguson. As the 1930s progressed, Busch began to focus increasingly on composition and soon forged his own personal creative language. This decade saw the first of his many songs, a widely acclaimed Piano Concerto,³ and, on 1 June 1935, his marriage to Sheila, with whom he had two children, Nicholas and Julia. His life was cruelly cut short when he died of an internal haemorrhage at Woolacombe, Devonshire on 30 January 1945, robbing British music of one of its most promising and versatile talents.⁴

¹ John Amis, 'Obituary', *The Musical Times* (March 1945), p.94.

² First broadcast on 29 December 1989, on BBC Radio 3.

³ Lyrita SRCD 320.

⁴ For a more detailed biography, see 'William Busch: 1901-1945', by his daughter Julia Busch, http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2003/nov03/William_Busch.htm

His output is modest, but of the highest quality. Most of his works are in small forms, such as songs,⁵ piano music⁶ and chamber works, but he also wrote a Cello Concerto (1940-41).⁷ A Violin Concerto was left incomplete at the time of his death.

Busch wrote his *Passacaglia*, for violin and viola in 1939, beginning work on it on 22 March of that year. Marked 'Allegro con brio, energico', the score takes the form of a decisive, four-bar theme followed by thirty variants upon it. These mini-variations range widely in character, from trenchant and forceful to airy and smooth. There are many instances of imitative writing in the vibrant, closely argued dialogue between the two instruments. Towards the end of the piece, the music becomes more intense, culminating in a final variant, which has the spontaneity of a cadenza and is rounded off by an emphatic restatement of the incisive opening theme.

The **Quartet for piano and strings** (1939) is the most substantial of William Busch's chamber pieces. Although the composer's lyrical gifts are much in evidence, the four movements are also rigorously concise. Considerable dramatic rewards are gained from the creative tension between the music's unforced expressivity and the formal rigour with which Busch's powerful themes are worked out.

The composer provided his own notes on the Quartet:

Allegro con brio - the first movement consists of two groups of subjects, the first very energetic, the second 'tranquillo' which are developed mainly contrapuntally in ever-increasing agitation to a big climax. From this point the feeling grows gradually quieter and the movement ends with a quiet coda.

Largo molto cantabile - the second movement has the character of a lament. It reaches a climax in an impassioned passage for solo violin, supported by unison notes on the other strings. There is a middle section of a sadly reflective, pastoral nature.

⁵ Lyrita SRCD 409

⁶ Lyrita SRCD 408

⁷ Lyrita SRCD 320

Molto vivace, con energico - the third movement is in Scherzo form and opens tempestuously. The 'Trio' section is quieter and marked 'Allegretto comodo, con gentilezza'.

Andante non troppo, con solennita (Tema con Variazione) - The finale opens with a solemn, stately theme on the piano followed immediately by its repetition on the strings. There are twelve variations. Just before the close the first bars of the first movement re-enter very quietly and work up to a triumphant finish'.

The work was performed several times by the London Belgian Piano Quartet⁸ and they included it at a memorial concert for Busch held at London's Cowdray Hall on 28 March 1945. A review of the recital in *The Times* singled out the Quartet as 'chief among the featured pieces and described it as, 'a work of substance and feeling', which 'admirably conforms to the description of chamber music as impassioned discourse'.⁹ The Piano Quartet became one of the composer's most performed and broadcast works, including BBC relays by the London Belgian Piano Quartet on the Home Service on 22 April 1945, the Philharmonic String Trio and pianist Iris Loveridge on the Third Programme on 2 February 1950 and the Prometheus Ensemble on 29 December 1989, as part of the 'Forgotten Reputations?' Radio 3 series.

Three pieces for violin and piano (1943-44) were written at Busch's home in Woolacombe, North Devon. He wrote them as individual works and, as such, they can be presented separately or, if given collectively as a suite, played in any order. Dated March 1943, the 'Cantilena' begins softly, with an eloquent, understated main theme, rendered in a broad tempo. In the dramatic central section, the pace increases and the music becomes restless and dynamic. Peace is restored in the final bars, as the violin's pair of soaring harmonic chords offer solemn affirmation. The spirited 'Caprice', from December 1943, is rhythmic and light.¹⁰ A variety of expressive techniques are

⁸ The London Belgian Piano Quartet members were pianist Marcel Gazelle, violinist Maurice Raskin, violist Leonard Ardenois and cellist Rodolphe Soirons. Busch noted in his diary entry for 24 September 1943 that, Soirons told him that the players all considered his Piano Quartet to be 'one of the best British ones' they had encountered.

⁹ 'A Memorial Concert', *The Times* (31 March, 1945), p.6.

¹⁰ The *Caprice* is dedicated to violinist David Martin, who married the cellist Florence Hooton in 1938.

presented, with much lively interplay between the two instruments before the brisk closing flourish. Written in November 1944, the 'Lacrimosa' unfolds fluently an elegant, melancholic theme. The main melody's final appearance is emotionally charged, while the delayed resolution of a semitonal clash in the closing cadence is bittersweet.

Busch wrote several works for cello during World War II, the most substantial of which was his Cello Concerto (1940-41). This concertante piece was written for the celebrated cellist Florence Hooton, who premiered it at the Proms on 13 August 1943.¹¹ Florence Hooton was also the dedicatee of Busch's *Suite for Cello and Piano* (1943), his weightiest score for these forces. Sombre and purposeful, the first movement, 'Prelude', begins with a commanding cello statement, buttressed by trenchant piano chords, that has the directness and urgency of an intense, public discourse. A tautness in the writing is maintained throughout the movement, even in the more songlike middle episode. A concentrated version of the opening material, now more intense and lavishly decorated, signals the end of this compellingly dramatic curtain-raiser. The following 'Capriccio' is a keen-edged scherzo, enjoying numerous rhythmic sleights of hand. A florid trio-section in the nature of a ballad does nothing to darken the mood before the first section returns, inventively varied. The Nocturne third movement has the serene innocence of a berceuse and offers fervent, long-breathed cello lines over the keyboard's gently undulating patterns. The concluding 'Tarantella' has a ferocious, irrepressible rhythmic energy that becomes slightly ominous in its unflagging drive, before a thrillingly defiant denouement. This bravura finale has all the brilliance of a standalone showpiece and in a 1964 Wigmore Hall recital, Florence Hooton performed it independently of the other movements. In a write-up of the event in *The Times*, the reviewer dubbed the piece, 'somewhat macabre'.¹²

The *Suite* is among Busch's most searching and variegated instrumental works. In a postwar assessment of the score, *The Times'* critic noted that its four pieces 'reveal a sensitive and interesting mind'.¹³

¹¹ Florence Hooton (1912-1988) recorded instrumental works by Arnold Bax and Gordon Jacob with pianist Wilfred Parry for Lyrita in the late 1950s (REAM 2104).

¹² 'Gracious Cello Artist', *The Times* (21 February 1964), p.15.

Elegy, for cello and piano (1944) exploits fully the stringed instrument's lyrical qualities and capacity for rich, autumnal colours. The work begins with an extended soliloquy for unaccompanied cello and the cellist continues to preside over the entire opening section, which features only a couple of brief interjections from the piano. At the work's midpoint, a more ardent, declamatory passage is shared equally between the two instruments and this eventually yields to a more relaxed, flowing sequence based on the opening material. An impassioned reminder of the initial soliloquy precedes a hushed and sustained final chord.

A Memory, for cello and piano (1944) was written for Elizabeth Poston.¹⁴ Busch subtly conveys the idea of a reminiscence suggested by the title with simple, lightly sketched ideas presented with an air of hazy nostalgia. Eventually, the feeling of distance and reserve created in the opening portion of the work is replaced by a more troubled mood. The music ends in sorrow with a heartfelt, steeply descending sequence for unaccompanied cello followed by the merest hint of the opening material. *A Memory* shares melodic content, and an atmosphere of poignant regret, with Busch's song *The Promise*, the last of his settings of five poems by Wilfred Gibson in the cycle *There Have Been Happy Days*, composed the same year.¹⁵

Paul Conway, 2024

*This article has been enhanced by access to prime material,
generously supplied by Julia Busch*

¹³ 'Things Old and New: Recent Publications', *The Times* (21 March 1947), p.6.

¹⁴ Composer, pianist and writer, Elizabeth Poston (1905-1987) had a distinguished career in radio broadcasting.

¹⁵ Featured on Lyrita SRCD 409

For more information about the Artists

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<https://piattiquartet.com>

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Cello Concerto & Piano Concerto

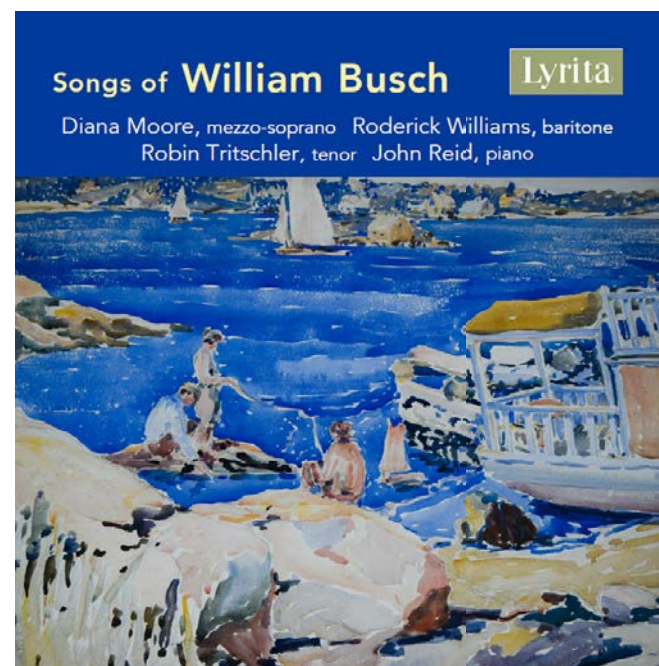
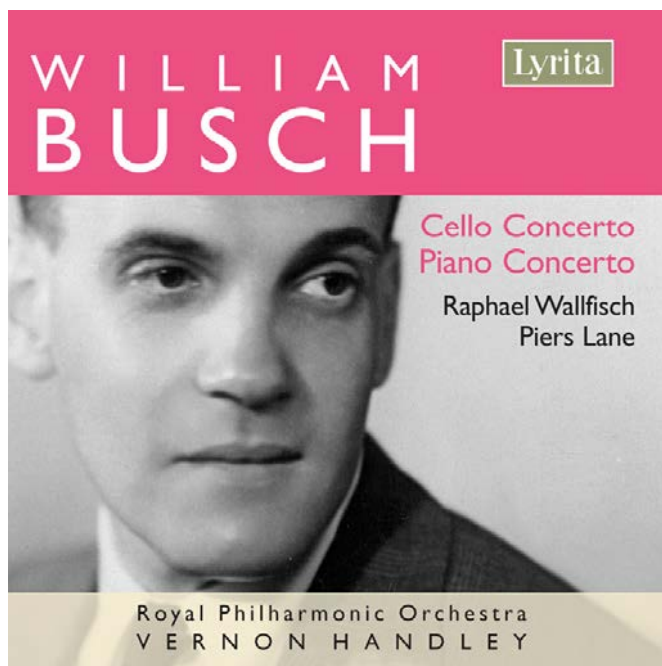
This is music of a highly personal nature...The Cello Concerto is a masterpiece. An excellent recording, clean, bright and clear with first-rate balance between the superb soloists and orchestra. John Amis's very informative, and personal, notes in the booklet complete one of the very best issues ever to come from Lyrita. Buy it. Cherish it. Bob Briggs, musicweb-international.com *** *Penguin Guide 2009*

Songs of William Busch - alongside those of his contemporaries, Gerald Finzi & Elizabeth Poston

These songs are performed so well here that I hope other singers will take note and include them in their programs. No one sings songs like these better—or records them more often—than Roderick Williams. The familiar marvels of his singing are in full evidence here: tonal warmth, elegant phrasing, and lucid diction. Robin Tritschler and Diana Moore are more than worthy colleagues. *American Record Guide*

Piano Music of William Busch and Rebecca Clarke

Simon Callaghan has performed an admirable public service in recording the complete piano music of William Busch and Rebecca Clarke, the pianist's efforts laudable for ensuring their music lives on. The release of the seventy-minute set requires no more defence than the music itself, however, which is splendid and performed exquisitely by Callaghan, a Steinway Artist of no small renown. *Textura*



Also available on Lyrita by William Busch

Piano Concerto & Cello Concerto
Piers Lane, piano Raphael Wallfisch, cello
RPO, Vernon Handley

Complete Piano Music of
William Busch & Rebecca Clarke
Simon Callaghan, piano

Songs of William Busch
Alongside those of his contemporaries
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Roderick Williams, baritone
Robin Tritschler, tenor
John Reid, piano

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