

The NAXOS logo is located in the top left corner. It consists of the word "NAXOS" in a white, serif font, centered within a blue square. Above the text are three stylized white columns, and below it are three horizontal lines, suggesting a classical architectural motif.

NAXOS

Grace
WILLIAMS
(1906–1977)

Mari Lwyd • To Death

Jeremy Huw Williams, Baritone
Wendy Hiscocks, Piano

Grace Williams (1906–1977)

Mari Lwyd • To Death

Grace Williams' lifelong interest in writing for voice(s) no doubt owed something to her upbringing in Barry, south Wales. There, her father, William Matthew Williams, had conducted the world-renowned Romilly Boys' Choir, played a significant role in delivering the National Eisteddfod of 1920, and generally encouraged his daughter and her siblings to enjoy a musically adventurous childhood. Periods of study at the Royal College of Music under Ralph Vaughan Williams and in Vienna with Egon Wellesz were followed by around 15 years of combining composition with a career in music education in and around London. Ill health forced a return to Barry in 1947 – her place of birth once again becoming her home for the remaining 30 years of her life.

While Williams' few surviving works of the 1920s are all for voices, the increasing prevalence of the orchestra in her output has no doubt contributed to her being chiefly remembered today as a composer of colourful, well-crafted instrumental music. Works such as *Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes* (1940), *Sea Sketches* (1944), *Penillion* (1955) and the *Trumpet Concerto* (1963) have achieved a public prominence through radio broadcasts and live performances that her vocal music never has, with only *Fairest of Stars* (1973, for soprano and orchestra) being committed to disc during her lifetime. Listeners had to wait until 1985 to be able to purchase a record of any of her choral pieces and until 2017 to hear any of her voice/piano songs – despite a body of work which her biographer, Malcolm Boyd, credited with being 'of the highest quality and originality'.

To Death (1953) shares an almost processional atmosphere with *Lights Out* (1965) (available on *Grace Williams Songs*, 8.571384), with great use made of stark, bare octaves in the piano.

Mari Lwyd is certainly among one of the earliest of Williams' works to survive and may date back to the 1920s. Drawn from a set of nine arrangements, it sets a text associated with the Welsh carolling tradition involving a horse's skull (the 'Mari Lwyd' itself) mounted upon a pole and taken from door to door. Although musically fairly conservative, the accompaniments display the care Williams took from the outset of her career to enhance, rather than detract from, the traditional tunes.

Graeme Cotterill

1 Mari Lwyd

*We are unable to reproduce the original Welsh text
due to copyright restrictions*

Traditional and Sir Thomas Parry (1904–1985)

Grey Mare

*Well, here we are coming,
Simple fellows,
To ask permission to sing.*

*We are six amiable men,
The best men in the world,
To sing in truth for beer.*

*O sing your best,
And so we ourselves will know,
How many be good enough to get beer*

*If we don't get permission,
Listen to the singing,
Whichever way we leave, this night.*

English translation: John Price

2 To Death

Come not in terrors clad, to claim
An unresisting prey:
Come like an evening shadow, Death!
So stealthily, so silently!
And shut mine eyes, and steal my breath;
Then willingly, O willingly,
With thee I'll go away!

What need to clutch with iron grasp
What gentlest touch may take?
What need with aspect dark to scare,
So awfully, so terribly,
The weary soul would hardly care,
Call'd quietly, call'd tenderly,
From thy dread power to break?

'Tis not as when thou markest out
The young, the blest, the gay,
The loved, the loving – they who dream
So happily, so hopefully;
Then harsh thy kindest call may seem,
And shrinkingly, reluctantly,
The summon'd may obey.

But I have drunk enough of life –
The cup assign'd to me
Dash'd with a little sweet at best,
So scantily, so scantily –
To know full well that all the rest
More bitterly, more bitterly,
Drugg'd to the last will be.

And I may live to pain some heart
That kindly cares for me:
To pain, but not to bless. O Death!
Come quietly – come lovingly –
And shut mine eyes, and steal my breath;
Then willingly, O willingly,
With thee I'll go away.

Caroline Southey (1786–1854)

Jeremy Huw Williams



Photo: Raphaëlle Photography

The Welsh baritone Jeremy Huw Williams studied at St John's College, Cambridge, at the National Opera Studio, and with April Cantelo. He made his debut with Welsh National Opera as Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) and has since appeared in more than 70 operatic roles. He has given performances at major venues in North and South America, Australia, China, India and most European countries. He has given recitals at Wigmore Hall and the Purcell Room, and at many major music festivals. He has appeared with the BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Ulster Orchestra. He has made many recordings for BBC Radio 3, and more than 50 commercial recordings, including more than 20 solo albums of songs. He was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by Glyndŵr University in 2009 for services to music in Wales, the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Music from the University of Aberdeen in 2011, and the Medal of the Order of the British Empire in the 2021 Queen's Birthday Honours.

www.jeremyhuwilliams.com

Wendy Hiscocks



Photo: Guy Carpenter

Wendy Hiscocks is an Australian-born composer-pianist based in the UK. Her music has been performed, broadcast and recorded by prominent artists, choirs and ensembles worldwide, such as Piers Lane, Michael Collins, Elizabeth Connell, Jesus College Choir and the Schubert Ensemble, at a range of venues and festivals including Aldeburgh, Amadeus and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music, with broadcasts on Radio France, ABC Radio and TV and BBC Radio 3. As a pianist, Hiscocks has performed at venues ranging from London's Purcell Room to the Kusatsu International Summer Academy and Festival in Japan. She appears on an album of her own chamber music, as well as the duet partner of Roy Howat on an album of Emmanuel Chabrier's music for Edition Stil. Her first song recording for Naxos featured the music of Arthur Benjamin and Edgar Bainton, with Hiscocks accompanying mezzo-soprano Susan Bickley and tenor Christopher Gillett (8.571377). Championing Australian music has been a lifelong interest; she has written the first biography of Arthur Benjamin, and is the artistic director of CAM (Celebrating Australian Music).

www.wendyhiscocks.com



The **British Music Society** (Registered Charity No. 1043838), founded in 1979, brings together professional and amateur musicians, students and scholars, and music enthusiasts young and old from around the globe to promote, preserve and celebrate British music, predominantly from the 20th century, both at home and abroad. Its extensive discography is now being reissued by Naxos, bringing to a wider audience many highly-acclaimed performances, often world premieres, of neglected British works. The Society's Historic label includes a number of famous vintage recordings by artists such as Noel Mewton-Wood and Walter Goehr.

In addition the Society produces a Journal, *British Music*, packed full of scholarly articles and reviews, as well as a regular e-newsletter for members. Our website lists forthcoming BMS events as well as performances of British music, and also provides a forum for discussion and debate.

www.britishmusicsociety.com

Grace Williams' lifelong interest in vocal writing no doubt owed something to her upbringing in Wales. She studied with Ralph Vaughan Williams and Egon Wellesz, and spent a significant part of her life combining composition with a career in music education. The album *Grace Williams Songs*, featuring a programme of all world premiere recordings, can be found on 8.571384. The two premiere recordings heard here, *To Death* from 1953, and the folk song *Mari Lwyd* from the 1920s, are further evidence of a body of work her biographer, Malcolm Boyd, credited as being 'of the highest quality and originality'.

Grace
WILLIAMS
(1906–1977)

- | | | |
|----------|---|-------------|
| 1 | Mari Lwyd ('Grey Mare') (probably 1920s)
Text: Traditional and Sir Thomas Parry (1904–1985) | 2:12 |
| 2 | To Death (1953)
Text: Caroline Southey (1786–1854) | 7:10 |



Raising the profile of music by women

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Jeremy Huw Williams, Baritone • Wendy Hiscocks, Piano

The sung texts and translations are included in the booklet, and may also be accessed at
www.naxos.com/libretti/70372.htm

Recorded: 28–30 September 2022 at Cooper Hall, Selwood Manor, Frome, Somerset, UK

Producer: Wendy Hiscocks • Engineer: Alastair Goolden

Editors: Wendy Hiscocks, Alastair Goolden, Jeremy Huw Williams • Booklet notes: Graeme Cotterill

This recording was made possible thanks to generous assistance from The British Music Society Charitable Trust (Charity no. 1122597; www.britishmusicsociety.co.uk) with additional funding from the Vaughan Williams Foundation (www.vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org) and the Ambache Charitable Trust.

Cover photograph: Barry, Vale of Glamorgan, South Wales, UK by Wendy Hiscocks

© & © 2024 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd • www.naxos.com