

Robert Thompson

80th birthday tributes

Robert Thompson has enjoyed a career unique among bassoon players since his highly praised recital debut in Carnegie Hall. A graduate of Yale School of Music and Julliard, his extraordinary musicianship was apparent from the start and composers from the American John Downey to the Polish Sir Andrzej Panufnik have trusted him with their works. The wide range of his artistry is apparent in the CD Box set released for his 80th birthday on Heritage encompassing the classics such as Vivaldi and Mozart but also lesser known works by Franz Danzi, Gordon Jacob and Arnold Bax. This new release for Heritage (HTGCD 402), displays not only the diversity of repertoire available to the solo bassoon, but also the distinctive tones and virtuosity of one of today's great performers.

Having been Principal Bassoon of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra for some time, he has an innate understanding of the dynamics of being a soloist and has appeared and recorded with many of the leading world orchestras including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the English Chamber Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Mozart Players, the Manchester Camerata, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Milwaukee Chamber Orchestra, and the London Musici. His distinctive playing was recently praised by Andrew McGregor on BBC Radio 3: *'There is something compelling about Robert Thompson's tone and musicianship that makes his performances unforgettable'* and other critics have been equally fulsome with *The Guardian* describing him *"as a wonderfully powerful and eloquent player"* and *The Independent* describing him *"as a player of plangent expressiveness."*

When the musicologist Bernard Jacobson introduced Thompson to Composer Andrzej Panufnik, it was a legendary meeting that resulted in one of the masterpieces of twentieth century composition. Thompson's acclaimed performance of the work in 1987, in a historic occasion in the Warsaw church of the murdered priest, Father Jerzy Popieluszki (to whom the concerto is dedicated), was received with great emotional response by the audience. On the reissue of the recording with the BBC SO under the composer's



Robert Thompson with Sir Andrzej Panufnik when recording Panufnik's bassoon concerto

baton for the centenary of Panufnik's birth in 2014, Andrew Clark wrote in the *Financial Times*: *'Panufnik's music of depth, poetry and emotion is revealed in this heartfelt reading by Robert Thompson of the elegiac power of the Bassoon concerto.'* And Paul Driver said in *The Sunday Times*: *'This recording of the Panufnik Bassoon concerto is notable for its dramatic impulse and Thompson's beautiful lyric tone.'*

His recordings for Columbia Records, Chandos, Gasparo, the Musical Heritage Society, Harmonia Mundi, and Conifer have been widely acclaimed and his album *'The 20th Century Bassoon'* was nominated for both Gramophone Magazine's "Outstanding 20th Century Recording" and the Koussevitsky Award for 20th century music.

He has also made many remarkable chamber recordings, working with the Fine Arts Quintet, the Coull String Quartet, the Chicago Symphony String Quartet, the ECO and the Milwaukee Chamber Orchestra. Today, he continues to give master classes all over the world including at the Royal Academy of Music, the

Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw, and the Royal Northern College of Music. He is in all one of the finest bassoon players of his generation and many of those who have worked with him pay their tributes to him on the occasion of his 80th birthday.



Writer, photographer, Lady Camilla Panufnik writes:

"Warmest 80th birthday greetings to the great American bassoonist,

Professor Robert Thompson. My husband, Sir Andrzej Panufnik, was from first hearing moved by Robert's deeply expressive and outstandingly beautiful sound which he conjured from his instrument, and, through the initiation of Bernard Jacobson, accepted his commission for a bassoon concerto with a special joy.

Robert Thompson was the most brilliant interpreter of the resulting dramatic, elegiac concerto, and his superb performances and recordings demon- ▶

strate to all future bassoonists the potential for profound emotion which is not often reached with this instrument, (too frequently known as "the clown of the orchestra"). My late husband's admiration for Robert and the pleasure of working with him has resulted in a lasting, affectionate family friendship, so, with my two children Roxanna and Jeremy and my grandchildren, all the Panufnik family wish dear Robert long and happy years in his advancing age."

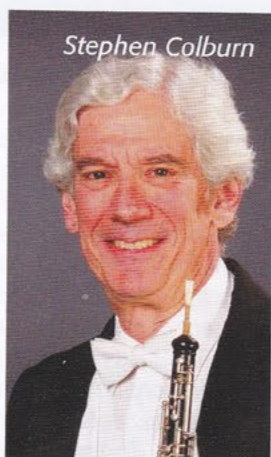
Camilla Jessel Panufnik, wife of the late Sir Andrzej and mother of their two children, classical composer Roxana and graphic artist, DJ and composer of electronica, Jem Panufnik. Camilla is currently updating and re-issuing her husband's autobiography *Composing Myself* as well as being herself a distinguished writer and photographer who exhibits regularly. She is the President of the Richmond Concert Society and a Trustee of the Richmond Music Trust.



Writer, critic and musicologist Bernard Jacobson:
"The bassoonist Robert Thompson is a musician of polished artistry and questing intelligence. In 1985, wishing to commission a concerto for his instrument, he did me the honour of consulting me on the choice of a composer. I introduced him to Andrzej Panufnik, who had until that moment had no thought of composing such a work. Panufnik was, however, so greatly impressed with Thompson in both personal and musical respects that he accepted the commission, rapidly fulfilling it with what stands as perhaps the most substantial and emotionally compelling concerto written for the

bassoon in the past two centuries. And Thompson has continued to be its devoted and highly persuasive champion."

Bernard Jacobson is a writer, critic and musicologist and former music critic for the London Times and Chicago Daily News. One of the pre-eminent musicologists of his generation, he has writing academic studies of Brahms and Panufnik as well as a study of the Polish Renaissance composers, Panufnik, Lutoslawski, Penderecki, and Górecki. For many years he was promotion director for Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, and also worked for Riccardo Muti during eight years as programme annotator and musicologist for the Philadelphia Orchestra, whose chamber-music series and extensive programme of pre-concert lectures he started.



American Conductor, Stephen Colburn:
Artistic Director, Washington Island Music Festival

"It is my very great pleasure to send warmest 80th birthday

wishes to Bob Thompson, my good friend and colleague of 35 years. I have so enjoyed working with Bob in the Milwaukee Chamber Orchestra, where he performed beautifully as Principal Bassoonist and served as a productive and helpful board member for many years. It was Bob's initiative which led to the commissioning and MCO performance of the Panufnik Bassoon Concerto in 1986 under the composer's direction. Of course, Bob was the magnificent soloist! I have watched and admired Bob's career and his many musical achievements. Most of all however, I have appreciated and enjoyed knowing and working with a wonderful friend and colleague. Joyeux anniversaire, Bob, and MANY more!"

Stephen Colburn, Director of the Washington Island Music Festival, was for many years the Principal Oboe and soloist with The Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. He has frequently performed as a featured soloist, performing the American premiere of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' Oboe Concerto under the composer's direction. As a conductor, Mr Colburn served as Music Director of the Milwaukee Chamber Orchestra from its founding in 1974 through the 2002 season. He has also served on the faculty of the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music, and was a visiting professor at Lawrence University. He was the recipient of the 2002 Distinguished Citizen Award given by the Civic Music Association of Milwaukee and was presented the 2003 Outstanding Service to Music Award by the Association of Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra.

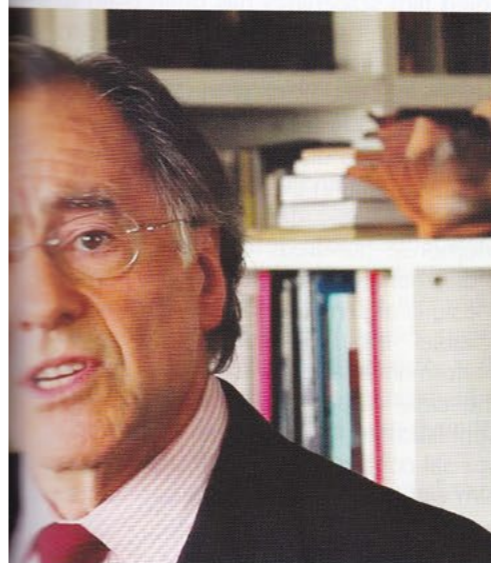
Geoffrey Simon, conductor:

*"Bob and I met as fellow Music Faculty members at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. We shared an entrepreneurial streak and dreamed up the Grand Viennese Ball, which was to become an annual fundraising tradition of the Music Department for more than 20 years. Also on the UWM faculty was composer John Downey. Bob and I performed John's remarkable *The Edge of Space: Fantasy for Bassoon and Orchestra* with the UWM Symphony. It led to our second major collaboration, a recording in London for Chandos Records of this and other*



*bassoon concertos, with the London Symphony Orchestra and English Chamber Orchestra, entitled *The 20th Century Bassoon*. Years later we came together again, working with the Chancellor of UWM to present a tribute concert for John Downey at the Barbican Centre in London with the Philharmonia Orchestra, at which we performed *The Edge of Space*. Bob was always an absolute delight to work with musically. His ideas were fresh and imaginative, his energy indefatigable and his bassoon sound rich, lustrous and eloquent. I feel privileged that he's been a firm friend for 38 years."*

Geoffrey Simon, the Australian conductor was a student of Herbert von Karajan, Rudolf Kempe, Hans Swarowsky and Igor Markevitch, and a major prize-winner at the first John Player International Conductors' Award. He has appeared with orchestras in the USA, UK, Europe and Australia and served as Music Director of the Albany Symphony, Sacramento Symphony and Northwest Mahler Festival. Of his 45 recordings, many combine familiar works with world premieres of rediscovered obscure works by Tchaikovsky, Respighi, Debussy, Ravel, Mussorgsky, Borodin and Grainger among others. For his own label, Cala Records, he has made *The London Sound Series*, bringing together ensembles of single instruments – all violins, violas, cellos, double basses, horns, trumpets, trombones and harp – drawn from leading British solo and orchestral musicians.



Roger Coull, Violin with the Coull String Quartet writes:

"It was the greatest privilege working with Robert Thompson on the recording of the Danzi bassoon quartets, both for his great musicianship and for the beautiful timbre of his playing. I know his playing has been an inspiration to other bassoonists and his discovery of neglected scores as in this instance, as well as his commissioning of new works as with the Panufnik concerto, all of which have greatly enhanced the repertoire for the instrument. The Coull Quartet would like to wish him the very happiest of happy 80th birthdays."

The Coull String Quartet was formed in 1974 by students at the Royal Academy of Music under the guidance of renowned quartet leader, Sidney Griller, they rapidly achieved national recognition, and were appointed Quartet-in-Residence by the University of Warwick in 1977, a post which they still hold today. The Quartet, which includes two of its founder members, has performed and broadcast extensively throughout the UK, and has made tours of Western Europe, the Americas, Australia, China, India and the Far East



American Conductor, David Amos:
"As a conductor, I appreciate the talent and industry of Robert Thompson, who aside from being an outstanding musician is also a visionary and a pioneer in rediscovering, performing, and recording jewels for the bassoon repertoire which have been unjustly neglected."

My admiration for Robert became evident at the time we met in London to record music by Arnold Bax together with the London Symphony Orchestra. His professionalism and musicality was obvious to us who participated in the recording session. Congratulations on his 80th birthday, and with best wishes for many years of creativity and music-making."

David Amos is an orchestral conductor who has specialised in introducing lesser known works of composers worthy of greater recognition. It was in this vein that he worked with Bob on the recording of the little known *Threnody and Scherzo for bassoon and strings* by Arnold Bax which has been widely acclaimed. David has commissioned new works as well as conducted world premiere performances in concerts and recordings with leading London orchestras such as the LSO and LPO as well as many other national orchestras. An ongoing project is documenting American and Jewish music through live recordings and encouraging young composers in these genres.