

A color portrait of Kathleen Ferrier, a woman with dark, wavy hair, looking upwards and to the right with a slight smile. She is wearing a dark blue high-collared dress with a large, round, gold-colored brooch at the neck. The background is a solid greenish-grey.

# *The Very Best of* **Kathleen Ferrier**

Blow the Wind Southerly  
What is Life? (Che farò)  
The Keel Row • Handel's Largo  
Come You not from Newcastle?  
I Know Where I'm Going  
Drink to Me Only  
Ma Bonny Lad • Ca' the Yowes  
Der Musensohn (Schubert)  
An die Musik (Schubert)  
Thou that Tellest (Messiah)  
Art Thou Troubled?  
O Rest in the Lord (Elijah)  
Silent Noon • Kitty My Love  
Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal  
Down by the Salley Gardens  
& more....

*Centenary Collection*

**alto**

# Very Best of Kathleen Ferrier – Centenary Album

- |      |  |      |      |   |      |
|------|--|------|------|---|------|
| [1]  | Interview with Kathleen Ferrier, Montreal                              | 1:50 | [12] | <b>Bach:</b> <i>Matthäus-Passion</i> , BWV248:<br>Have Mercy, Lord (Erbarme dich) | 8:03 |
| [2]  | trad. arr. <b>Whittaker:</b> <i>Blow the Wind Southerly</i>            | 2:16 | [13] | <b>Handel:</b> <i>Messiah</i> - O thou that tellest good tidings                  | 5:33 |
| [3]  | trad. arr. <b>Whittaker:</b> <i>The Keel Row</i>                       | 1:41 | [14] | <b>Handel:</b> <i>Xerxes</i> - Ombra mai fu (Largo)                               | 4:38 |
| [4]  | trad. arr. <b>Britten:</b> <i>Come You Not from Newcastle?</i>         | 1:32 | [15] | <b>Handel:</b> <i>Rodelinda</i> - Art thou troubled?                              | 4:36 |
| [5]  | trad. arr. <b>Quilter:</b> <i>Ye Banks and Braes</i><br>(Robert Burns) | 3:08 | [16] | <b>Mendelssohn:</b> <i>Elijah</i> - O Rest in the Lord                            | 3:36 |
| [6]  | trad. arr. <b>Hughes:</b> <i>I Know Where I'm Going</i>                | 2:20 | [17] | <b>Vaughan Williams:</b> <i>Silent Noon</i> (text: Rossetti)                      | 4:51 |
| [7]  | trad. arr. <b>Quilter:</b> <i>Drink to Me Only</i>                     | 3:00 | [18] | <b>Quilter</b> : <i>Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal</i><br>(text: Tennyson)          | 2:26 |
| [8]  | trad. arr. <b>Whittaker:</b> <i>Ma Bonny Lad</i>                       | 1:46 | [19] | trad. arr. <b>Hughes:</b> <i>Kitty My Love</i>                                    | 1:16 |
| [9]  | trad. arr. <b>Jacobson:</b> <i>Ca' the Yowes</i>                       | 3:21 | [20] | trad. arr. <b>Hughes:</b> <i>Down by the Salley Gardens</i>                       | 3:05 |
| [10] | <b>Schubert:</b> <i>Der Musensohn</i> (Goethe)                         | 2:13 | [21] | <b>Mahler:</b> <i>Um Mitternacht</i> (text: Rückert)                              | 6:22 |
| [11] | <b>Schubert:</b> <i>An die Musik</i> (Schober)                         | 3:03 | [22] | <b>Gluck:</b> <i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i> - What is Life? (Che farò)                 | 4:23 |

## Kathleen Ferrier, *contralto*

with

**Phyllis Spurr**, *piano* (tracks [2], [3], [5]-[8], [10], [11], [18] & [20])

**John Newmark**, *piano* (track [9])

**Frederick Stone**, *piano* (tracks [4], [17], [19])

**National Symphony Orchestra • Sir Malcolm Sargent**, *conductor* (track [12])

**London Philharmonic Orchestra • Sir Adrian Boult**, *conductor* (track [13])

**London Symphony Orchestra • Sir Malcolm Sargent**, *conductor* (tracks [14], [15], [22])

**Boyd Neel Orchestra • Boyd Neel**, *conductor* (track [16])

**Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra • Bruno Walter**, *conductor* (track [21])



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## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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As the centenary of her birth, 2012 sees renewed interest in the life and recordings of the English as contralto **Kathleen Ferrier**. Musical tastes change and singers come and go, but the record-buying as public has remained constant to this most loved performer over the years. Despite changing tastes as (the drive towards authenticity" and matters of pronunciation) Ferrier appears to be as popular as with those like myself too young to have heard her live' or to have bought her records when first as issued, as with those who were fortunate enough to have seen her in performance. as a child I first as became aware of her when given a second hand copy of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* coupled as with three *Rückert Lieder* (LXT 2721/22)) and a 10" L P containing arias by Gluck, Handel and as Mendelssohn (LW 5072). At the time I knew nothing of her life but was immensely struck by as the nobility of her delivery and warmth of her voice. Only later when I understood German did I as understand the poignancy of the finale of *Der Abschied* (from *Das Lied*) and why older listeners as shed a tear when they heard her sing 'What is life' (Che farò? from Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*).

Ferrier had initially hoped to make a career as a pianist and was considered promising enough to as represent her North West region at the finals of a competition sponsored by the Daily Express in 1928, as held at the Wigmore Hall. Ferrier was so disappointed with her performance that day that in an effort as to console herself she went with her sister Winifred to Drury Lane to see *Show Boat* and wept buckets as when she heard Paul Robeson's voice. Ferrier's experience as a sometime accompanist resulted in a greater than usual appreciation of that art and consequently she took enormous care to choose only the as very best accompanists for her concerts and recordings, always treating them as equals.

Phyllis Spurr made a number of recordings with Ferrier and often accompanied her on tours throughout Britain and parts of

Europe, particularly Holland where Ferrier was exceptionally popular. Spurr, once described by Ferrier as ' a nice poppet', shared the singer's delight at being treated as a VIP wherever they went. She also appeared to know the very moment Ferrier wished to be left in peace before a concert, something much appreciated by Kathleen. in this CD we hear Spurr accompanying Ferrier in many traditional songs including the lovely *I know where I'm going*, the popular title song of an evocative and beautifully shot Powell and Pressburger film, as well as her iconic versions of *Blow the Wind Southerly*, *The Keel Row* and many more. Frederick Stone, another accompanist had also trialled at the same piano competition as Kathleen in 1928! Folksong became a major and popular area of her repertoire.

Arias by Bach and Handel were among Kathleen Ferrier's last recordings and were reissued seven years after her death in stereo. Ferrier admitted that she had found Boult's orchestration rather heavy (that being the practice at the time) and was relieved when she sang *The Messiah* with her friend Sir John Barbirolli, who being relatively new to the work, was prepared to pare down the number of players so that Ferrier did not feel the need to force her voice. One wonders what she felt about that murderous middle passage in *Von der Schönheit*, the fourth song in *Das Lied von der Erde* especially as Ferrier was battling with cancer by that time!

Kathleen Ferrier worked with some of the greatest conductors. Whilst the greatest friend was probably Sir John Barbirolli, the conductor for whom she felt the deepest respect was Bruno Walter (1876-1962). As with Barbirolli, it is a tremendous shame that contractual reasons meant that she and Walter made so few commercial recordings together. Walter was regarded as *the* authority on the music of Gustav Mahler because of his close association with Mahler, whom he had assisted in Hamburg and Vienna. Despite acclaimed recordings, Mahler's works were still seen as an acquired taste and he was a relatively little-known composer in Britain when Ferrier first sang his music.

On 11 September 1947 at the Edinburgh Festival Bruno Walter had conducted a momentous performance of *Das Lied* with Peter Pears, who had already sung the work several times, and Kathleen Ferrier who at the time was not widely known outside Britain. This performance was extremely successful and Walter was so impressed by Ferrier's performance and sympathy with Mahler's music that he immediately expressed hope they might record some together. At her audition for Walter, Ferrier had sight-read Mahler's music and impressed the conductor with her musicality and from then on, she was a clear first choice whenever Walter performed this work.

During performance Ferrier often found it difficult to mask her feelings and on more than one occasion found herself unable to sing through to the close of the final song *Der Abschied* (Farewell) without tears. When this first occurred in Edinburgh, far from scolding her, Walter envied her capacity to involve herself emotionally in the music.

However Bruno Walter was at the time one of Columbia's most prestigious artists, whilst Ferrier was contracted to Decca and both companies guarded their artists jealously. Kathleen Ferrier had made the first move, asking Decca to be released from her contract. The request was refused. Ferrier then told the Decca management how honoured she had felt to be singled out by such an esteemed maestro and how Decca's generosity (should they relent) would reflect on the industry as a whole. She also drew their attention to the fact that she had been promised a Messiah recording which had never materialised and that Decca owed her a favour!

Decca finally concluded a deal with Columbia and on 4 October 1949, during a Vienna Philharmonic tour of Britain, they released Ferrier to record *Kindertotenlieder* with Walter (issued on three 78's, now alto ALC 1153). In 1952 the agreement was reversed when Columbia released Walter in order to record *Das Lied*, and this performance has long been recognised as being a 'classic' of the gramophone. On the fourth side Decca recorded

three of Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder* (with *Das Lied* on alto ALC 1120). *Um Mitternacht* (At midnight) is the third in the cycle and portrays the loneliness of the poet who wakes in the small hours but believes that God will see him through these frightening moments. By the time of this recording the musical world was aware that Ferrier had cancer and so the final song with its references to taking a last farewell both to humankind and to the beauty of nature have a terrible poignancy. Kathleen Ferrier must have experienced many such 'frightening moments' as the cancer took its grip in the final years of her all too brief life.

Referring to Ferrier's perspectives again perhaps we quote a letter to Neville Cardus about Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben* (11 November 1952) justifying her hand movements (he thought her OTT) during these songs:

*I adore the Frauenliebe and I can see that girl growing up from a child to a woman - and these light songs are all the highlights of joy and sorrow. If someone I adored had just proposed to me, I should be breathless with excitement and unable to keep still; and if I had a child I should hug it till it yelled, so I can't help singing it this way, especially as I usually sing it to English audiences with little, or no knowledge of German. I probably underline more than I ordinarily would the changes of mood.*

This reinforced the regret the public later felt that she herself did not experience these milestones.

An operation had appeared to arrest her illness but its reappearance in late 1952 led to renewed concerns. She did however agree to sing a series of performances of *Orfeo ed Eurydice* at Covent Garden with Barbirolli in February 1953. The first performance was inspirational but in the second she felt terrible stabbing pains, only completing the performance through sheer will-power. Despite further operations and occasional signs of recovery it was only a matter of time before she finally succumbed. She died on 8 October 1953.

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**Alto ALC1157**

**5055354411571**

Recorded in 1946 ([12], [13], [16], [22]), 1949 (tracks [2], [3], [5]-[8], [10], [11], [14], [18] & [20]), 1950 (tracks [1] & [9]), and 1952 ([4], [13], [17], [19], [21]).

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Remastered for alto by **Paul Arden-Taylor**

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***alto***