

# YORK BOWEN

The complete  
solo 78-rpm  
recordings



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## *The complete solo 78-rpm recordings*

COMPACT DISC 1 (62.23)

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- BEETHOVEN **Piano Concerto No 4 in G major** Op 58 (29.17) . . . . . (Vocalion A-0237/40, matrices 03984/9)  
1 Allegro moderato (cadenza by York Bowen) (15.33) . . . . . recorded in 1925  
2 Andante con moto (4.17) . . . . . released in September 1925  
3 Rondo (cadenza by York Bowen) (9.27)  
AEOLIAN ORCHESTRA conducted by STANLEY CHAPPLE
- BACH **Partita No 2 in C minor** BWV826 . . . . . (AFMC 2045, matrix 03392)  
4 VI Capriccio (1.51) . . . . . recorded in 1923; released in October 1923
- BEETHOVEN **Piano Sonata No 13 in E flat major** Op 27 No 1 . . . . . (AFMC 2046, matrix 03391)  
5 I Andante – Allegro – Andante (3.18) . . . . . recorded in 1923; released in October 1923
- BEETHOVEN **Piano Sonata No 24 in F sharp major** Op 78 (6.31) . . . . . (Vocalion K-05281, matrices M-0186/7)  
6 Adagio cantabile – Allegro, ma non troppo (3.20) . . . . . recorded in 1927  
7 Allegro vivace (3.10)
- SCHUMANN **Faschingsschwank aus Wien** Op 26 . . . . . (Vocalion K-05269, matrices M-0103/4)  
8 I Allegro (7.20) . . . . . recorded in 1926; released in December 1926
- LISZT **Années de pèlerinage, première année – Suisse** S160 . . . . . (Vocalion X-9511, matrix 03393)  
9 VII Egloue (3.15) . . . . . recorded in 1925
- 10 MOSCHELES **Etude** Op 70 No 5 (1.40) . . . . . (Vocalion X-9511, matrix 03390)  
11 COCHRANE **Le Ruisseau** (1.30) . . . . . recorded in 1925
- 12 BRAHMS **Capriccio in B minor** Op 76 No 2 (3.01) . . . . . (Vocalion X-9598, matrix 03936)  
recorded in 1925; released in August 1925
- 13 MENDELSSOHN **Scherzo in E minor** Op 16 No 2 (2.30) — . . . . . (Marathon HD-466, matrix 842 I.P.)  
14 SCHÜTT **Etude Mignonne in D major** Op 16 No 1 (2.03) . . . . . released in January 1915

- 1 CHOPIN **Ballade No 3 in A flat major** Op 47 (6.14) . . . . . (Vocalion X-9666, matrices 04138/9); recorded in 1925
- 2 CHOPIN **Scherzo No 2 in B flat minor** Op 31 (7.37) . . . . . (Vocalion K-05237, matrices 04137, 04176); recorded in 1926
- 3 CHOPIN **Waltz in A flat major** Op 34 No 1 (4.00) . . . . . (Vocalion K-05261, matrix M 054)  
recorded in 1926; released in November 1926
- 4 CHOPIN **Polonaise in C sharp minor** Op 26 No 1 (3.50) . . . . . (Vocalion K-05261, matrix M 055)  
recorded in 1926; released in November 1926
- 5 CHOPIN **Etude in E minor** Op 25 No 5 (3.20) . . . . . (Vocalion K-05275, matrix M 0145); recorded in 1927
- CHOPIN **Twenty-Four Preludes** Op 28 . . . . . (Vocalion K-05275, matrix M 0146)  
recorded in 1927
- 6 No 23 in F major: Moderato (0.59)
- 7 No 20 in C minor: Largo (1.50)
- 8 No 3 in G major: Vivace (0.55)
- RACHMANINOV **Preludes** Op 23 . . . . . (Vocalion K-05214, matrix 03938)  
recorded in 1926; released in February 1926
- 9 No 5 in G minor (3.41)
- RACHMANINOV **Morceaux de fantaisie** Op 3 . . . . . (Vocalion X-9562, matrix 03765)  
recorded in 1925
- 10 IV Polichinelle (3.24)
- DEBUSSY **Estampes** . . . . . (Vocalion K-05146, matrix 03766)  
recorded in 1925
- 11 III Jardins sous la pluie (3.13)
- 12 DEBUSSY **Arabesque No 2 in G major** (3.11) . . . . . (Vocalion K-05214, matrix 04136)  
recorded in 1926; released in February 1926
- GARDINER **Five Pieces** . . . . . (Vocalion K-05259, matrix M 0184)  
recorded in 1926
- 13 III London Bridge (1.41)
- 14 V Gavotte (1.40)
- BOWEN **Suite No 2** Op 30 . . . . . (Vocalion X-9562, matrix 03764)  
recorded in 1925
- 15 FINALE A Romp (2.22)
- 16 BOWEN **The Way to Polden** An Ambling Tune, Op 76 (3.13) . . . . . (Vocalion X-9598, matrix 03937)  
recorded in 1925; released in August 1925
- 17 BOWEN **Arabesque** Op 20 No 1 (3.42) . . . . . (Vocalion K-05146, matrix 0376xx); recorded in 1925
- BOWEN **Fragments from Hans Andersen** Op 58 with spoken introduction . . . . . (Vocalion K-05269, matrix M 0185)  
recorded in 1926
- 18 Thumbelina (1.51)
- 19 The Windmill (2.05)

EDWIN YORK BOWEN was born in Crouch Hill, London in 1884. His father owned the whisky distillers Bowen & McKechnie, and York was the youngest of his three sons. Bowen's mother gave him his first piano lessons and not long afterward enrolled him at the North Metropolitan College of Music. At eight years of age Bowen performed a piano concerto by Dussek and continued his tuition in piano with Alfred Izard at the Blackheath Conservatoire. At fourteen Bowen won the Erard Scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music where for the next seven years he studied piano with Tobias Matthay and composition with Frederick Corder. He won many prizes for composition and piano performance and while still at the Academy and aged only nineteen performed the premiere of his First Piano Concerto in December 1903 under Alexander Mackenzie. The following summer he performed this work at the Proms at the invitation of Henry Wood. A few years later the eminent conductor Hans Richter conducted performances of Bowen's First and Third Piano Concertos in London and Manchester with Bowen as soloist. Bowen's youthful success continued and in 1909 at the age of twenty-five he was appointed a professor at the Royal Academy of Music. His promising career as a composer and pianist was interrupted by the First World War where he played the horn in the regimental band of the Scots Guards.

Before the First World War Bowen was regarded as one of Britain's finest composers and pianists. He often played his own works at his concerts, but also championed works by his friends and contemporaries and more often than not collaborated with instrumentalists. In

1904 he performed the Scottish Piano Concerto by Alexander Mackenzie and some Preludes by Paul Corder as well as a movement from the Piano Sonata by Benjamin Dale. The following year he played Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 at a Prom concert and at Bechstein Hall (later to become Wigmore Hall) he programmed 'three modern sonatas' – by J B McEwen, Dale and Glazunov, the latter's Piano Sonata No 1 in B flat minor published four years before. He also played regular repertoire from the pianist's canon and, at an Aeolian Hall recital, included Chopin's Piano Sonata in B minor. He was described as playing, 'as he always does, with sureness and neatness and the feeling of ease that only comes with experience'. However, when he performed Tchaikovsky's First Concerto again at the Queen's Hall in October 1908 one reviewer wrote, 'Both he and the orchestra gave the work with the utmost freshness and with untiring vigour. A certain number of wrong notes may be forgiven to a solo player when the thermometer stands at 80 degrees; but still it must be said that some of the octave passages were very rough, and Mr York Bowen failed to produce great beauty of tone in the quieter passages.' Bowen also seems to have favoured programmes made up of short pieces, rather than substantial ones. In 1911 he gave a recital that began with preludes and etudes by Bach, Chopin, Bowen, Lyapunov and Rosenbloom followed by sets of variations by Paderewski and Brahms and concluded with Ballades by Chopin, Brahms and Grieg. The following year he included Schumann's Piano Sonata No 2 in G minor in a recital at Aeolian Hall and it seems that Bowen had an affinity with this composer.

His recording of the first movement of the *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* Op 26 can be heard here. In a reference to Florestan and Eusebius, one reviewer wrote, 'the distinctive charm of Mr York Bowen's art is that these two moods are not held apart and alternated, but delicately and intimately fused'. Other composers represented on the programme included Scarlatti, Ernest Schelling, Balfour Gardiner and Moszkowski. The critic went on to say that 'the pianist's own compositions were the most interesting part of the programme'.

By the mid 1920s, the world was a very different place after the turmoil of the First World War. Music had taken a new path and slight criticism of Bowen the composer began to appear in print. 'Mr York Bowen plays the piano like a composer, i.e., he respects the capacity of the instrument and the intentions of the composers he is interpreting – in this case, Franck and Grieg. The result is a pleasing tone and a sense of proportion. He played a number of his own works including a new piece, *The Way to Polden* (CD2 track 16), correctly described as 'an ambling tune', in which abundant chromaticism suggested that the pedestrian belonged to the canine species and found many deviations of his own on a fairly direct road. Other of his works showed his fluency, but the absence of a distinctive or personal style.'

Bowen performed less between the Wars and spent more time teaching although in 1937 he performed Liszt's Piano Sonata in a recital at Aeolian Hall. One critic wrote that it, 'was for once treated with musical feeling, not merely as an opportunity for pianistic brilliance'.



It would appear that Bowen's first recording was made for a very small British label named Marathon. Owned by National Gramophone, which began trading in August 1911, the company changed its name to The National Gramophone Company in 1913 and around 478 ten-inch discs and 66 twelve-inch discs were produced before it went out of business in 1915. Only one side was issued of Bowen, and that appeared in January 1915 shortly before the company's demise. Bowen gives a spirited performance of Mendelssohn's popular Scherzo in E minor Op 16 No 2 and Eduard Schütt's *Etude Mignonne* Op 16 No 1. It was customary a century ago to improvise modulatory passages between works of different keys to prevent an abrupt key change which may jar the ears of the audience. Busoni does this on his recording of Chopin's Prelude in A major and Etude in G flat major and Bowen does it here, using some distinctly 'Bowen' harmonies, to move from E minor to D major. All the Marathon discs were double sided and Bowen's side was coupled with Sinding's *Rustle of Spring* played as a harp solo by Signor C. Lorenzi. Marathon used the 'hill and dale' technique of recording which produced an inferior sound but meant many more grooves could be squeezed onto a side of a disc – the longest twelve-inch side produced by the company ran for 6 minutes and 25 seconds, while the longest ten-inch side lasted 5 minutes and 28 seconds.

The Anglo-French Music Co. Ltd. was a business set up in 1916 by two directors of the Aeolian Company. Certain composers and academics were involved, the idea being to record pieces set for the examinations by the

Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. In this way, students could hear an 'ideal' interpretation of the work they had to learn for their exam. The pianist on the first recordings was Desirée MacEwen and in October 1923 more discs were released by five other pianists including York Bowen. Only two sides have been traced and they afford a good opportunity to hear Bowen in 'serious' repertoire by Bach and Beethoven rather than encore pieces.

Originally an American company producing pianos and other musical instruments, Aeolian Vocalion began producing recordings in the United States in 1918. In the United Kingdom, discs on the Aeolian Vocalion label were issued from December 1920 by the Aeolian Company Ltd. who sold the business to the newly formed Vocalion Gramophone Company Ltd. in January 1925. The British studio began to use the electrical system of recording on 11 August 1926 using the Marconi process, but discs continued to be issued on the Vocalion label only until 1927.

By the time Aeolian Vocalion was formed in Britain, most of the famous pianists of the day had been signed to rival labels such as Columbia and HMV. At the beginning of 1923 pianists making records for UK Aeolian Vocalion included the Frenchwoman Jeanne Marie Darré, and British pianist Herbert Fryer. Only one disc of Fryer seems to have been released and around 1921 a single disc by Claudio Arrau – his first recording – was available for a short time. The most prestigious pianist on the label was Vassily Sapellnikoff who had performed Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 with the composer conducting.

and, in a coup for Vocalion, gave the work its premiere recording in 1926. Bowen's recording career with Vocalion lasted less than eighteen months; one of his first recordings was of the Brahms Capriccio in B minor Op 76 No 2 and his own work, *The Way to Polden*, 'a typically genial product of his own fluent and versatile pen', as the publicity put it.

The only piano concerto Bowen recorded was not one of his own, but Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 4 in G major Op 58. Released in September 1925 it was the first recording of this work, a fact applauded by contemporary reviewers. Bowen played his own cadenzas, that to the first movement sounding particularly incongruous. It did not meet with the satisfaction of one reviewer who complained that, 'Mr York Bowen, who, so far, has earned our sincere admiration, shows disastrously how he can juggle with Beethoven's tunes. The result is mildly Chopinesque but quite out of the picture; though in the linking on to the final section Mr Bowen reminds us he is a good creative artist.' In conclusion the reviewer wrote, 'The piano part is exceedingly well played by Mr York Bowen. He evidently loves the music and his clean technique reveals it in the best light possible. Apart from that one cadenza his interpretation seems imaginative and poetical and always that of a well-equipped musician.' Compton Mackenzie, the editor of *The Gramophone* wrote, 'Mr York Bowen scores a definite success, and Mr Chapple, the conductor, is much to be congratulated, except for his handling of the woodwind – particularly the oboes. He and the Vocalion recorders must devote some attention to these instruments.' The recorded sound is good, even though this

recording was made by the acoustic process, as was the disc of Debussy's Arabesque No 2 and Rachmaninov's Prelude in G minor Op 23 No 5, released in February 1926. In November 1926 Vocalion announced, 'Improved Process Electric Recording. Vivid recordings by York Bowen.' Of the Chopin Waltz in A flat Op 34 No 1 and the Polonaise in C sharp minor Op 26 No 1 Vocalion gushed, 'Here is actuality! True piano tone, secured for the first time by means of the Improved Electrical Process. Never before has the technique of that eminent pianist, Mr York Bowen, been so faithfully reproduced as in these amazing recordings.' However, the Marconi process was inferior to those used by other recording companies and the sound quality is not that much better than that of the late acoustic recordings. It is in the longer recorded solo works that Bowen is shown to best advantage. The recordings of Schumann's *Carnaval in Vienna* Op 26 and the Ballade and Polonaise of Chopin all display his natural exuberance and vitality and a sure technique. The Ballade in A flat Op 47 is probably the best of his Chopin recordings, but Bowen seems even more at home in the 'modern' music by Debussy, where he revels in characterisation, and Rachmaninov, where the central section of the Prelude in G minor Op 23 No 5 is beautifully shaped. The performance of his own compositions is exemplary. Even though his compositional style did not change greatly over the years he continued to compose and teach and made one further recording at the end of his life, an LP for the Lyrita label of his own works. Bowen died in 1961.

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Transfer & compilation: Ward Marston

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Executive Producer: Michael Spring

Front cover photograph courtesy of Malcolm Binns



## BOWEN *The complete solo 78-rpm recordings*

### COMPACT DISC 1 (62.23)

- 1 BEETHOVEN **Piano Concerto No 4 in G major** Op 58 (29.17) recorded in 1925
- 4 BACH **Partita No 2 in C minor** BWV826 Capriccio (1.51) recorded in 1923?
- 5 BEETHOVEN **Piano Sonata No 13 in E flat major** Op 27 No 1 Andante (3.18) recorded in 1923?
- 6 BEETHOVEN **Piano Sonata No 24 in F sharp major** Op 78 (6.31) recorded in 1927
- 8 SCHUMANN **Faschingsschwank aus Wien** Op 26 Allegro (7.20) recorded in 1926
- 9 LISZT **Années de pèlerinage, première année – Suisse** S160 Elogue (3.15) recorded in 1925
- 10 MOSCHELES **Etude** Op 70 No 5 (1.40) recorded in 1925
- 11 COCHRANE **Le Ruisseau** (1.30) recorded in 1925
- 12 BRAHMS **Capriccio in B minor** Op 76 No 2 (3.01) recorded in 1925
- 13 MENDELSSOHN **Scherzo in E minor** Op 16 No 2 (2.30) released in January 1915
- 14 SCHÜTT **Etude Mignonne in D major** Op 16 No 1 (2.03) released in January 1915

### COMPACT DISC 2 (58.58)

- 1 CHOPIN **Ballade No 3 in A flat major** Op 47 (6.14) recorded in 1925
- 2 CHOPIN **Scherzo No 2 in B flat minor** Op 31 (7.37) recorded in 1926
- 3 CHOPIN **Waltz in A flat major** Op 34 No 1 (4.00) recorded in 1926
- 4 CHOPIN **Polonaise in C sharp minor** Op 26 No 1 (3.50) recorded in 1926
- 5 CHOPIN **Etude in E minor** Op 25 No 5 (3.20) recorded in 1927
- 6 CHOPIN **Twenty-Four Preludes** Op 28 No 23 (0.59); No 20 (1.50); No 3 (0.55) recorded in 1927
- 9 RACHMANINOV **Preludes** Op 23 No 5 in G minor (3.41) recorded in 1926
- 10 RACHMANINOV **Morceaux de fantaisie** Op 3 Polichinelle (3.24) recorded in 1925
- 11 DEBUSSY **Estampes** Jardins sous la pluie (3.13) recorded in 1925
- 12 DEBUSSY **Arabesque No 2 in G major** (3.11) recorded in 1926
- 13 GARDINER **Five Pieces** III London Bridge (1.41); V Gavotte (1.40); recorded in 1926
- 15 BOWEN **Suite No 2** Op 30 FINALE A Romp (2.22) recorded in 1925
- 16 BOWEN **The Way to Polden** An Ambling Tune, Op 76 (3.13) recorded in 1925
- 17 BOWEN **Arabesque** Op 20 No 1 (3.42) recorded in 1925
- 18 BOWEN **Fragments from Hans Andersen** Op 58 Thumbelina (1.51); The Windmill (2.05) recorded in 1926



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Front cover photograph  
courtesy of Malcolm Binns

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