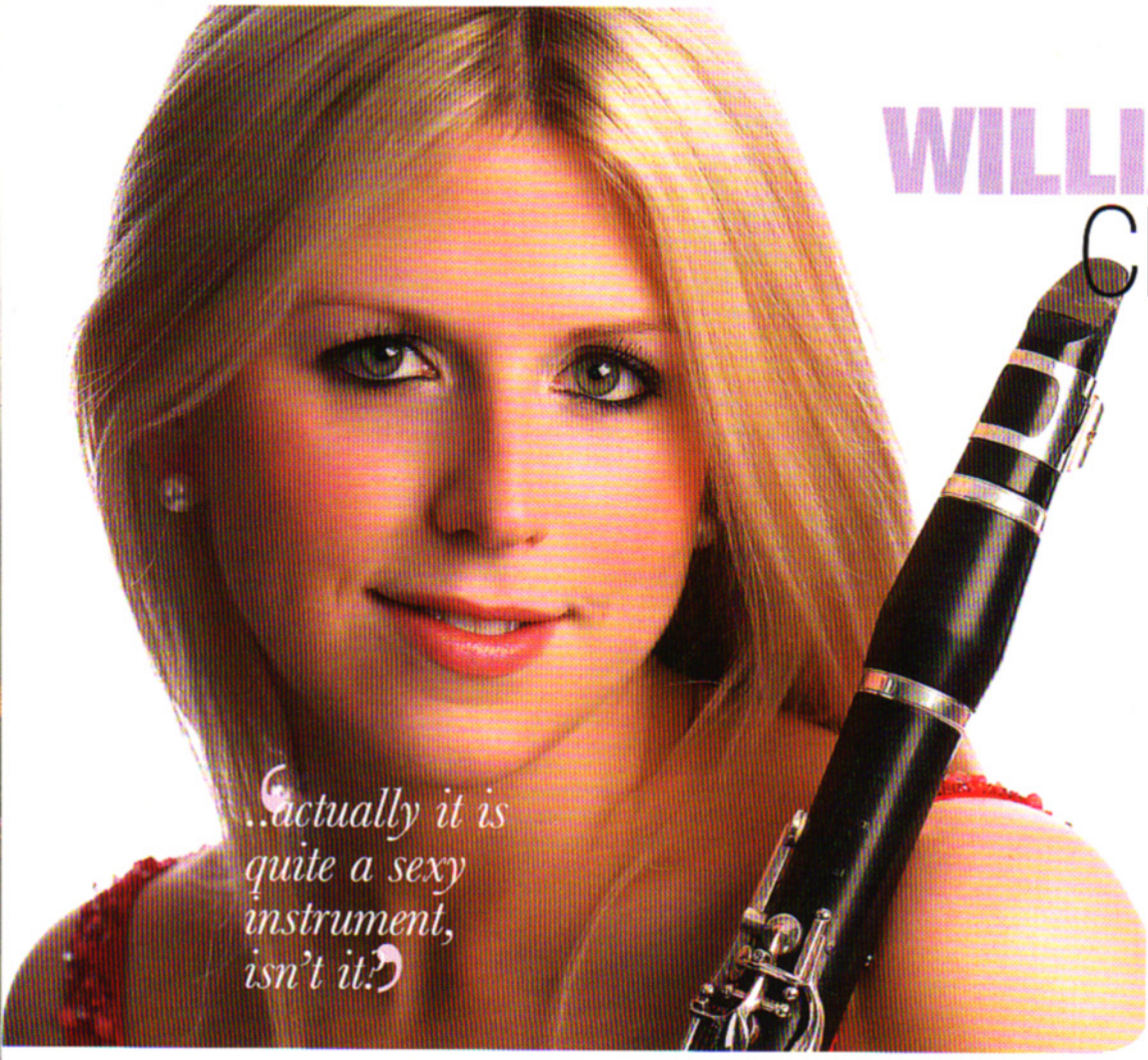
Hot Property

THE YOUNG ARTISTS SETTING CLASSICAL MUSIC ALIGHT



SARAH WILLIAMSON
Clarinettist

Andrew Mellor *talks instruments, audiences, composers and languages with the woodwind star*

'...actually it is quite a sexy instrument, isn't it?'

Even in a profession inhabited by somewhat determined creatures, I've come across few more single-minded young soloists than Sarah Williamson. Here's a girl who saw clarinettist Pascal Moraguès performing in Paris, promptly learnt French, and enrolled at the city's conservatoire for four years of study with him. She doesn't mess around when it comes to hobbies, either: occupying no small portion of her London flat is a huge kiln with which Sarah fires her nascent passion for pottery. You get the distinct idea that if she wants something, she gets it.

Over a tray of her own freshly baked scones, Sarah explains what drove her to leave England when she was barely 18. 'I was so wowed by Pascal's performance that I thought, right, I have to learn from that teacher,' she says with a seriousness in her eyes. 'I knew he taught at the conservatoire, so I knew I had to get in there.' And get in she did, graduating on to even more impressive feats of bravery – including performing live on TV as a finalist in the 2002 Young Musician contest.

For all her focus and drive, Sarah is warm and approachable. Qualities, one suspects, which may be behind her fruitful partnership with the Orchestra of the Swan, the small, affable ensemble with which she'll make her London concerto debut on 28 October, and which joins her on a forthcoming disc of concertos by Finzi and Copland.

The latter piece has become something of a signature for Sarah, and actually reveals the poise and patience of her musical personality. She loves the Copland Concerto, she explains, for its subtleties; its beautifully lyrical, slowly unfolding opening movement. The tempo of her speech slows as she describes it, as if she's playing it through in her mind.

You can talk about music with Sarah for hours: opera, early music, piano music... even The Eagles and The Killers. She's currently collecting John Eliot Gardiner's complete Bach Cantata series on CD (no clarinets in those), and already has most of Valery Gergiev's recordings of Russian opera on Philips. But we can't hang around talking about CDs all day; Sarah has to dash off to Covent Garden, where she's watching the 16 hours of Wagner's *Ring* cycle across the next four days. That really is one incredible appetite for music!

HOT FACTS

Travels to the United Arab Emirates for a series of concerts in November; 'I love Arabic culture... the food, the language, everything about it!' she says.

Played under Pierre Boulez in the Ensemble Intercontemporain while still a student in Paris; 'to be involved in something like that was really sensational'.

HEAR HER AT...

Copland, Phibbs: Clarinet Concertos
Sarah joins regular partner the Orchestra of the Swan for concertos old and brand new.
Wednesday 28 October, 7.30pm
Cadogan Hall, London
020 7730 4500; cadoganhall.com

SIMON TOTTMAN, ALEX MACNAUGHTON