

LSO St Luke's

CHAMBER MUSIC



Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: NICHOLAS DANIEL

Friday 6 May 2022 1pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Alan Bush Northumbrian Impressions Op 42a
Robert Schumann (arr Howard Ferguson)

Three Canonic Studies

Helen Grime Three Miniatures

Huw Watkins Five Welsh Folksongs

Francis Poulenc Oboe Sonata

Nicholas Daniel oboe

Huw Watkins piano

Northumbrian Impressions Op 42a

Alan Bush

- 1 Prelude
- 2 Lament
- 3 Dance

Alan Bush firmly believed that music should be for everyone, not just the privileged elite. Born into a middle-class background, he became Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music at the age of 25, and taught there for over half a century. He joined the Communist Party in the mid-1930s, and never wavered from his political beliefs, despite having his music temporarily banned by the BBC during World War II, and then being cold-shouldered by much of mainstream musical opinion for his pro-Soviet stance during the Cold War period.

In 1953 Bush visited Northumberland to research material about the struggles of 19th-century mining communities for a forthcoming opera. A chance encounter with the Duke of Northumberland's personal piper, Jack Armstrong, inspired him to write a suite for Northumbrian smallpipes (a bellows-blown bagpipe with seven keys and three drones). There are three movements – Prelude, Lament and Dance, the final movement being based on the local folktune *The Mitford Galloway*. Shortly afterwards Bush arranged the suite for oboe and piano to make it more widely known.

Three Canonic Studies

Robert Schumann arr Howard Ferguson

- 1 Con molto espressivo
- 2 Allegretto
- 3 Con sincerità

These pieces were also originally composed for an unusual instrument – the pedal piano. In 1843 Robert Schumann acquired an upright pedal keyboard, incorporating both a normal keyboard and a 29-note pedalboard connected to an independently strung soundboard at the back. He was so smitten with it that he persuaded Mendelssohn to set up a special pedal piano class at the Leipzig Conservatory. He composed two sets of pieces for it, *Six Canonic Studies* Op 56, and *Four Sketches* Op 58. The Irish composer Howard Ferguson has transcribed three of these expressive, quintessentially Schumann-esque pieces for clarinet or oboe and piano: the first and third are arrangements of Nos 2 and 4 of the *Canonic Studies*, while No 2 is the last of the *Four Sketches*.



Three Miniatures

Helen Grime

- 1 **Lento**
- 2 **Quasi scherzando**
- 3 **Grave**

The Scottish composer and oboist Helen Grime studied at the Royal College of Music, where her composition teachers included Julian Anderson and Edwin Roxburgh. She now lectures in composition at Royal Holloway College, University of London. Her works include concertos for oboe, clarinet, violin and percussion, as well as the LSO-commissioned orchestral piece *Virga*, which was performed at the 2009 Proms, and a Trumpet Concerto (*night-sky blue*) premiered by the LSO and Håkan Hardenberger last month.

Three Miniatures for oboe and piano dates from 2005. According to the composer, each short and concentrated movement aims to display the wide variety of expression of which the oboe is capable. The first movement opens with a simple melody in oboe harmonics while the two individual instrumental lines gradually overlap as it reaches its climax. In the second movement, faster and more virtuosic, a spiky piano line is decorated and punctuated by oboe interjections before the oboe flowers into an expressive melody, and the movement ends with a cadenza-like passage interspersed with fragments of the piano's opening material. The last movement begins in the depths of the piano's compass, with a theme later developed by the oboe. Towards the end, notes Grime, 'a solo oboe cadenza draws on all three movements before a sparse and delicate reminder of the movement's opening'.

Five Welsh Folksongs for Oboe and Piano

Huw Watkins

- 1 **Hela'r Sgyfarnog**
- 2 **Y Deryn pur**
- 3 **Y Fwyalchen**
- 4 **Codiad yr Hedydd**
- 5 **Ar Hyd y Nos**

Today's pianist Huw Watkins studied piano with Peter Lawson at Chethams School of Music, and went on to study composition at the University of Cambridge and the Royal College of Music with Robin Holloway, Alexander Goehr and Julian Anderson. He now teaches composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

Huw says that he always wanted to arrange some of his favourites from the wonderful repertoire of Welsh folksongs, so familiar from his childhood. Last year he completed a set of five for tenor and piano – *Hela'r Sgyfarnog* (Hunting the Hare); *Y Deryn pur* (The Dove); *Y Fwyalchen* (The Blackbird); *Codiad yr Hedydd* (The Rising of the Lark) and, perhaps the most famous, *Ar Hyd y Nos* (All Through the Night). While writing them, Huw says, 'I had in the back of my mind that I would make an oboe version for Nicholas Daniel, whose remarkable musicianship I've loved and admired for over 20 years'. This year he has done so.

Oboe Sonata

Francis Poulenc

- 1 **Elégie: Paisiblement, sans presser**
- 2 **Scherzo: Très animé**
- 3 **Déploration: Très calme**

Francis Poulenc's Oboe Sonata, dedicated to the memory of Sergei Prokofiev, was the last of a group of three woodwind sonatas written towards the end of his life. Composed in the summer of 1962, six months before his death from a heart attack, its final *Déploration* (Lament) was Poulenc's swansong. The opening Elegy, marked 'Peacefully, not fast', opens on a piercingly high oboe D, introducing a four-note phrase that flowers into a heartfelt lament, beneath which the piano pulses steadily. The instruments share a second, lyrical theme, interrupted by stern interjections, before revisiting earlier material. The outer sections of the tarantella-like Scherzo pay homage to Prokofiev in his spiky, ironical vein, before the piano calmly embarks on the chorale-like *Déploration*, its anguished plaint and melting harmonies recalling an ancient French tradition of musical laments on the deaths of colleagues. It stands as the composer's own memorial.

Programme notes by Wendy Thompson

Nicholas Daniel

oboe

Nicholas Daniel OBE is one of the world's great oboists. He has significantly enlarged the oboe repertoire by commissioning hundreds of new works. In 2012 he received the prestigious Queen's Medal for Music and was cited as having made 'an outstanding contribution to the musical life of the nation'. In October 2020 he was awarded an OBE.

Nicholas records and broadcasts widely, including regular recordings on the Harmonia Mundi Label, and boasts a huge international following on social media. He is proud to support and patronise many important initiatives, charities and trusts, has directed several music festivals and concert series, most notably in Germany and at Dartington, and has been Music Director of the Leicester International Music Festival and lunchtime series for many years. He is highly sought after as a teacher, including as Professor at Germany's Trossingen Musikhochschule.

Having been a boy chorister at Salisbury Cathedral, Nicholas was put into the spotlight at the age of 18 when he won the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition. After a short period of study at London's Royal Academy of Music with Janet Craxton and Celia Nicklin, and privately with clarinettist Anthony Pay and with Hans Keller, he quickly established his career with debuts at the BBC Proms and on disc.

He has been a concerto soloist with many of the world's leading orchestras and conductors, performing a huge range of repertoire from Bach to Xenakis and beyond, premiering works written for him by composers including Harrison Birtwistle, Henri Dutilleux, James MacMillan, Thea Musgrave, John Tavener and Michael Tippett, and encouraging many younger composers to write for the oboe. His recording of concertos by Vaughan Williams and MacMillan was awarded the *BBC Music Magazine* Premiere Award in 2016.

Nicholas is a founder member of the award-winning Britten Sinfonia, the Haffner Wind Ensemble and the Britten Oboe Quartet, whose debut disc was released to acclaim on the Harmonia Mundi label in 2017. He works regularly with pianists Huw Watkins and Julius Drake, and with many leading string quartets including the Carducci, Doric and Vogler. He is principal oboist of Camerata Pacifica, California's leading chamber music ensemble, and is a popular guest at music festivals all over the world.

Huw Watkins

piano

Pianist and composer Huw Watkins studied at Chetham's School of Music and with Robin Holloway, Alexander Goehr and Julian Anderson at the University of Cambridge and the Royal College of Music, where he was awarded the Constant and Kit Lambert Junior Fellowship. He now teaches composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

As a pianist, Huw Watkins appears regularly with orchestras including the London Sinfonietta, Britten Sinfonia and the BBC orchestras and at the Aldeburgh and Cheltenham festivals, and has performed at venues including the Barbican, Wigmore Hall, Library of Congress in Washington and the Smithsonian Institute. Strongly committed to new music, Huw has premiered works by Alexander Goehr, Tansy Davies, Michael Zev Gordon and Mark-Anthony Turnage, and performed piano works by Hans Werner Henze for a BBC Total Immersion day at the Barbican.

Huw Watkins performs chamber music regularly with his cellist brother Paul, and with Alina Ibragimova, James Gilchrist, Daniel Hope, Nicholas Daniel, Sebastian Manz, Mark Padmore, Carolyn Sampson and Alexandra Wood. He has featured as both Composer in Residence and pianist at festivals including Presteigne and Lars Vogt's 'Spannungen' Festival in Heimbach, as well as with the Orchestra of the Swan (2012-14).

Huw Watkins's compositions have been commissioned and performed by the Nash Ensemble, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Belcea Quartet, Elias Quartet, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra and Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra. His Double Concerto, Violin Concerto and Cello Concerto received premieres at the BBC Proms. In 2005 the London Symphony Orchestra commissioned his *London Concerto* for their centenary. He was Composer-in-Association with BBC NOW 2015-18 and is currently Composer in Residence at the Wigmore Hall.

Huw Watkins regularly features on BBC Radio 3 as a performer and composer. His recordings include Mendelssohn cello and piano works (Chandos) and British cello sonatas (Nimbus) with his brother Paul, Alexander Goehr's piano cycle *Symmetry Disorders Reach* (Wergo) and Thomas Adès' song cycle *The Lover in Winter* with countertenor Robin Blaze (EMI Classics). A disc of his compositions released by NMC Records (*In My Craft or Sullen Art*) has received enthusiastic reviews.