Michael Finnissy at 60

I’ve hardly ever had so bracing an experience in a live recital ... a discourse that is as astonishing for expressive plasticity as it is for relentless continuity and savage intellectual power ... He is one of the most original composers of our day.

Paul Driver, The Sunday Times, on Folklore

Michael Finnissy celebrated his 60th birthday on 17 March 2006. His large output encompasses works for orchestra and ensemble, sacred and secular choral music, and three operas. As a virtuoso pianist himself, Finnissy has made an especially significant contribution to the repertoire of solo piano music, ranging from unique takes on the music of other composers and cultures such as Gershwin or Verdi or in the large-scale Folklore, to the positively monumental The History of Photography in Sound, to be played by long-time Finnissy advocate Ian Pace at Southampton University on 6 May.

The 60th birthday year includes a wide range of events celebrating both existing works and no fewer than four world premieres. The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, based at St Pancras Church in London, has in recent years championed other Finnissy choral works including Anima Christi and Seven Sacred Motets, and so it seems fitting that it should unveil a new setting of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis at its Choral Evensong service on 7 May. On 19 May, the tenor Robert Murray and the Dante Quartet will premiere a new work commissioned by the Brighton Festival and appropriately entitled BRIGHTON!, to be performed in the famous Music Room of the Royal Pavilion.

Michael Finnissy has long been concerned with providing music for amateur musicians as well as the most technically gifted of professionals. The Chanctonbury Chorus, based in the composer’s home town of Steyning in Sussex, celebrates the birthday of its ‘local composer’ on 17 June, by giving the world premiere of a work for soprano, chorus, and ensemble that it has commissioned, entitled Favourite Poets. Looking ahead to the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in November, the soprano Kirsten Blaise and pianist Nicolas Hodges (another tireless champion of Finnissy’s music) give the world premiere of a major new work written especially for them and commissioned by the Festival and the BBC. The title is a clue to another of the composer’s ‘Favourite Poets’ – Whitman.

A major focal point of the 60th birthday year will be a weekend festival of choral, vocal, instrumental, and piano music to take place at The Warehouse in London. This will include performances by the acclaimed vocal group EXAUDI as well as the composer himself. More details will appear in the next issue of Oxford Music Now.
Michael Finnissy at 60

I think Michael Finnissy is the most important living British composer. The recent CD of his choral music by EXAUDI clearly confirmed the extraordinary range and humanity of his music. It’s a mystery to me why he isn’t more honoured in his own country, but perhaps that too is something of a tribute to his musical greatness.

Judith Weir

Your early mature works were often made up of savage contrasts – extremely high against extremely low, cataclysmically loud against whisperingly soft, impossibly sparse against overloadedly dense. That feature hasn’t gone away, it’s just taken a different form. Now your music has joy, but pitted against bitterness, extravagant luxuriousness against hard-nosed intensity of focus, empathy and generosity against estrangement and defensiveness … The truth that your music communicates is almost too much to handle.

Ian Pace

New Music Brighton congratulates Michael Finnissy, an honorary member of NMB, on his 60th birthday. We owe a great debt to Michael for his advocacy and support for Sussex composers, young and old and whatever their status. Over the years he has made invaluable contributions to our programmes, as an inspirational composer, as a perceptive and often challenging workshop director and as a fine pianist, giving generously of his time to perform the works of other members.

Patrick Harrex, New Music Brighton

Michael is a continuing inspiration for CoMA and a loyal friend. His steadfast belief in the contribution the amateur musician can make to contemporary music has been matched only by his tireless support for the many individual composers and performers within CoMA who do it simply ‘for the love of it’. Thank you, Michael, for all the encouragement and music you have given us all over the years; it is truly a privilege to know you and have worked with you. May there be much to come.

Chris Shurety, Director, CoMA

Michael has inspired and assisted so many composers, young and older, to realize their compositional dreams. He has devoted so much time and energy – and his own performing skill – so generously, to give others a chance to develop. In my case, his commitment to seeing a music theatre drama.

Julia Usher, CoMA member

I have had the pleasure and honour of conducting many works of Michael’s over a span of 30 years. Apart from the sheer inventiveness and originality of Michael’s music throughout this long period, it is the consistent vitality and sincerity of his creativity that shines through all of Michael’s music. Congratulations, Michael – may you continue to compose for many more years!

Gregory Rose, conductor and CoMA member

I will never forget being knocked for six by English Country Tunes when I first heard it in the 70s, and then again, years later, by the quite different Red Earth. Those are just two from the core of a prolific output which branches in so many rich and varied directions, yet always with complete honesty and consistency. Such astonishing sounds burn into the memory!

Anthony Powers

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Anthony Powers
Major new works by Martin Butler

Funérailles
A work for solo piano, to be performed by William Howard at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival on 9 May 2006.

Funérailles was written during the summer of 2005. Despite its title, the piece is not intended to be a morbid or even particularly sombre reflection on death or mortality; rather, it takes as a starting point the ritual and sequential shape associated with funerals or other formal ceremonies. It also makes significant use of bell-like tolling gestures as a way of creating a rather formal, cyclic structure. It can probably best be thought of as an extended study in piano sonorities, at times deep, dark, and resonant, at others vivid and bright.

Sentinels
A work for string quartet and viola, to be performed by the Brodsky Quartet and John Metcalfe (viola) at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, on 23 May 2006.

Sentinels was written for the Brodsky Quartet and John Metcalfe to perform at the Brighton Festival this year. It lasts for about 11 minutes and is in a single movement. I’ve been really pleased to write for the Brodskys again, since I was at college with the original four (two of whom are still in the group), and they premiered my first two quartets (the first of which is unpublished). An unusual feature of their performances is the fact that, with the exception of the cellist, they play standing up; and this proved to be the main stimulus for Sentinels. I imagined the four standing players to be acting as sentries, standing guard, keeping watch over the seated cellist and patrolling their space – hence the title. Then OUP’s very own Chloë Brookes pointed me in the direction of the opening scene of Hamlet – with its sentries, its sinister and slightly surreal atmosphere, its ghost, its uncertainty and apprehensiveness – and the flavour of the piece was fixed (thanks, Chloë!). It’s really a long, unrelenting march whose pulse never slackens or quickens; and the slightly quirky military-style gestures are almost always present.

News
Martin Butler will be the first ‘Composer in Focus’ for the Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra during the seasons of 2006/7 and 2007/8. The announcement comes as Martin prepares to write a large scale work for the orchestra, to receive its premiere at the close of the 2007/8 season. This prestigious position will enable Martin, a Brighton resident, to work closely with the musicians and offer valuable guidance for the orchestra’s educational projects. Other performances currently being planned include the Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra and Dirty Beasts in October 2006, and Fixed Doubles in March 2007.

The Schubert Ensemble is to record a disc of Martin Butler’s chamber and solo works, which will be released on the NMC label in 2007.
New works by Richard Causton
Three new works will receive premieres in 2006

A
lthough I sang in choirs throughout my growing up and had wanted to write a choral work for a long time, other projects always took over and somehow I never quite got around to it. So I was very excited last summer when I was commissioned by Geoffrey Webber to compose a piece for the Choir of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. The idea was to write a work which could be used in a liturgical context, and after a while I found a very beautiful devotional poem, written around eight hundred years ago by an unknown author. Although untitled, its first line reads ‘Jesus, sweet soné dear’, and the poem’s two short verses are written from the perspective of the Virgin Mary who, addressing Jesus, laments the freezing cold and the poverty in which they find themselves. It ends with a very intimate and moving couplet which finally offers some hope.

The piece reflects the cold, unyielding natural element on the one hand and the warm, human aspect on the other, by contrasting the choir with three solo voices which are located in another part of the church. Their music is remote and distant, as if somehow frozen in time – an idea which I explored previously in my piece Between Two Waves of the Sea, where a recorded orchestra occupies a different kind of time from the ‘live’ one. As Geoffrey Webber reminded me on seeing the score of the present piece, this choral technique also recalls Britten’s Hymn to the Virgin – and although my music is quite different from Britten’s, it is a kind of ‘homage’ which I should have been aware of, as I once sang in the Britten piece a long time ago.

Composing for unaccompanied choir has been quite different from anything I’ve done before – challenging, certainly, but also one of the most enjoyable of all the things I’ve written; being based in the countryside over the winter period when I wrote the piece also gave plenty of opportunity to experience and savour the cold at first hand!

Choral work for Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge

Quintet for the London Sinfonietta

My piece for the London Sinfonietta was commissioned by Henry Greenfield for performance at the Great Missenden Festival and is scored for flute, clarinet, piano, violin, and cello. The piece was commissioned in memory of Henry’s wife Joanna, who was a keen flautist and whom I had the honour of meeting not long before her death.

Aldeburgh Festival commission

Another current work in progress is scored for string orchestra and was commissioned by the Aldeburgh Festival for performance by the Britten Sinfonia under Christoph Poppen. The piece’s starting point lies in the fact that members of the string family (unlike wind, brass, or percussion) are all more or less the same instrument in different sizes – a fact which gives them all a very similar sound colour. My piece sets out to explore the limits of this and is a series of short and playful ‘colour studies’, which each exploit different timbral possibilities of the instruments.

Richard Causton

News

Causton’s work for violin and piano Seven States of Rain has been recorded by Darragh Morgan and will be released on the NMC label in May 2006.
Choral premieres

Hilary Tann

Contemplations (21, 22)

Anne Bradstreet with excerpts from Psalm 97(98); 1,4,8,9 Vulgate Bible;
Psalm 98: 1,4,8,9 King James Bible. Adapted by the composer

Duration c. 6'
First Performance: 4 November 2005
by the Radcliffe Choral Society,
conducted by Jameson Marvin, at
Sanders Theater, Harvard University,
Cambridge, MA

Contemplations (21, 22) combines
text from a work by the
seventeenth-century Puritan
poet Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) with
excerpts from Psalm 98 (King James
Bible). Considered to be America’s first
woman poet, Bradstreet was born in
Northampton, England, and was among
the earliest settlers of the Massachusetts
Bay Colony in New England, where she
raised a family and wrote devotional
poetry. Hilary Tann explains, ‘Water
images – stream, river, ocean, flood –
shape the composition as each recitative-
style “contemplation” concludes with a
freer “outpouring” section.’

Contemplations was a ‘hit’ with the
Radcliffe Choral Society and director
Jameson Marvin, at its premiere on 4
November, and again at their Christmas
concert on 10 December. Marvin
comments, ‘I think it is a wonderful piece
– and the concept is brilliant. … To my
ear it is the best “contemporary” piece
for women’s chorus I have heard.’

In March 2006, the Radcliffe Choral
Society performed Contemplations on
their two-week tour of the UK, with
performances at Southwark Cathedral,
London on 27 March, and at the Church
of St Mary the Great, Cambridge (29
March), Ely Cathedral (30 March), and
Trinity College (31 March). Amelia
LeClair, director of Cappella Clausura,
performed Contemplations in Boston on
11 and 12 March, and commented,
A wonderful, and ever so singable piece.
… The soprano parts are just lovely, and
liquid ... Thanks for writing it.

Suzanne Ford

Joseph Phibbs

Tenebrae

Tenebrae, a new OUP work by Joseph Phibbs, was commissioned by the St Albans Bach
Choir and is dedicated to the memory of Mary Draper. It was premiered on 1 April 2006
in St Albans Cathedral

Tenebrae was composed over the
spring and summer of 2005,
although my first thoughts for
the piece date back to the Service of
Lessons and Carols sung by the
Cathedral Choir the previous
Christmas. I was struck by the
extraordinary acoustic effect of the
opening carol, in which the choir sang
from the far end of the Abbey. I decided
to incorporate a similar device into my
own piece, using an off-stage chamber
choir in conjunction with a main choir.
The main choir sings settings of four
poems: the first, David Gascoyne’s The
Uncertain Battle, is from the twentieth
century, and the remaining three date
from the seventeenth century. Two of
these earlier texts are regarded as
‘metaphysical poems’, a chief
characteristic of which is a meditation
on the vastness of time and space, and
the fleetingness of man’s life in relation
to this. Interwoven among these
settings, the off-stage choir sings
excerpts from the Latin Mass, which
relate obliquely to the main settings
that surround them. A high soprano
also sings with the off-stage choir,
adding an individual strand to the
overall work.

Literally meaning ‘darkness’ in Latin,
Tenebrae sets up a poetic world where
darkness – and light – have metaphorical
and deeper meaning, as they did indeed
for the metaphysical poets. A common
thread running through many of the
texts in Tenebrae is that of opposites:
illusion and reality, appearance and
disappearance, noise and silence, and
light and darkness. The manner in which
the off-stage choir fades in and out of
the texture also suggests shades of light
and darkness, a kind of musical ‘shadow’
in the work, perhaps.

Joseph Phibbs

The orchestration for Tenebrae is the same as for
Fauré’s Requiem.
Choral premieres

Howard Skempton

Howard Skempton writes about the inspiration behind some of his most beautiful music.

The voice is universal and timeless. The subtlety and flexibility of this most human medium should commend it to all composers. It has certainly inspired some of the most imaginative, arresting music of the last sixty years (from Messiaen’s *Cinq Rechants* onwards). So why do some of our most inventive, talented composers shy away from it?

Perhaps it seems restricted when compared to a high-powered ensemble? Composers like to focus on instrumental skills and players relish the challenge. There is the same excitement, however, in writing for a virtuoso choral group like EXAUDI, with a repertoire which ranges from Hildegard to Finnissy.

More likely, a lack of interest stems from a lack of opportunity. Composers need to be approached and encouraged. In my own case, I was stopped in the street by a publisher wielding a sandwich, who suggested (between bites, it seemed) that I should write a piece for the OUP Chamber Choir, to celebrate their tenth anniversary. This commission may have been relatively spontaneous but working on *We who with songs felt like a homecoming* one piece led to another and composing choral music is now a principal concern. It stretches me in ways in which I would choose to be stretched and allows me to indulge my passion for poetry. The huge cherry on the cake is a social one, the warmth and enthusiasm of singers and choirs. So much mutual gratitude and generosity is certainly productive!

Howard Skempton

**News**

We are delighted to announce that Howard Skempton’s *Tendrils* for string quartet was awarded the ‘Chamber’ prize at the annual BACS British Composer Awards in December 2005. This is the second award for the work, which won in the category for ‘Best Chamber-Scale Work’ at the 2005 Royal Philharmonic Society awards.

A disc of Howard Skempton’s music will be released by NMC in Autumn 2007, Howard’s 60th birthday year. Acclaimed vocal group EXAUDI and the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group will present a combination of Skempton’s best choral and ensemble works.
Choral premieres

Bob Chilcott

• Missa ‘Cantate’ is a new concert setting for youth choir of the Latin Mass, which will be premiered in November 2006. Jointly commissioned by Cantate Youth Choir and co-sponsor Pax Travel, this lively and vibrant work promises to be a fantastic addition to the youth choir repertory.

• Two new works for Reigate and Redhill Choral Society (The Face of Peace) and Amabile Girls’ Choirs (So Fair and Bright) will both be premiered on 1 July 2006. For details of all new published titles by Bob Chilcott, see pages 14-15.

Meanwhile Bob’s dedicated work with youth choirs continues throughout the UK and beyond. He has recently returned from a trip to Michigan, USA in April directing the young singers of Midland Center for the Arts in a specially commissioned work for choir and obbligato flute, White waves on the water.

Link: www.mcfta.org

News

The Chamber Choir of Europe, directed by Nicol Matt, has released a new CD of Bob Chilcott’s music on the German label Bayer. Several of Chilcott’s major works are recorded here, including his extended sacred work Canticles of Light for chorus and orchestra, the double choir setting of My Prayer, after Purcell, and his lively, original cantatas Songs and Cries of London Town and The Making of the Drum.

Link: www.bayerrecords.de

Gabriel Jackson

Tewkesbury Festival commission

The Abbey School Choir, Tewkesbury has commissioned Gabriel Jackson to compose a setting of the Evening Canticles for performance as part of the Tewkesbury Spring Festival. The Tewkesbury Service will be premiered by the Choir and its Director, Benjamin Nicholas, on Ascension Day, 25 May 2006.

Link: www.awakenyoursenses.org
La fille mal gardée

La fille mal gardée, in its version with choreography by Frederick Ashton, and music by Ferdinand Hérold arranged and orchestrated by John Lanchbery (published by Oxford University Press), is one of the world’s best-loved and most frequently performed full-length ballets. ‘Pure joy’, ‘the first great English classic’, and ‘a rustic comedy of abundant English charm’ are just a few of the epithets picked up by the ballet since its creation for the Royal Ballet in 1960. Almost fifty years on, the score, the choreography, and (in many productions) Osbert Lancaster’s vibrant and colourful stage designs (these three elements perfectly complementing one another) continue to delight audiences around the world. And certain ‘set piece’ musical numbers (notably the ‘Clog Dance’) now have a life of their own as popular concert items.

Although the version of La fille mal gardée known and loved today is the Ashton/Lanchbery collaboration, the history of the ballet goes back to 1789, when this simple and charming story of a country ‘Romeo and Juliet’ was first choreographed by Jean Bercher Dauberval, and staged at Bordeaux, with anonymously written music, now largely forgotten. The ballet was revived at Paris in 1828, with a new score by Hérold (which in turn used music purloined from, amongst others, Rossini, as well as from the original). New music by Peter Ludwig Hertel was first used at a St Petersburg production in 1885, but from early in the twentieth century the ballet slowly fell out of favour, and then disappeared from the schedules, or was performed to a variety of choreography and music, and even under different titles. These earlier versions are still sometimes danced, but the Ashton/Lanchbery version is now that used in most of the world’s major houses. That Ashton chose La fille for the Royal Ballet in 1960 was something of a surprise to the company, and to his admirers – but success was immediate and long-lasting. The acclaim accorded to this ‘revival’ (in reality a brand new creation) was in no small measure due to the brilliantly orchestrated and wittily constructed musical score by John Lanchbery, whose experience as ballet conductor, arranger, and composer made him the ideal person to lift the dustsheets off Hérold’s original, and to bring to life Ashton’s wonderfully characterized cast on stage: the touching hero and heroine (Lise and Colas), the pompous and rich suitor Alaine, the pantomime dame-like pushy mother Widow Simone, and even the rooster and his entourage of yellow hens. Lanchbery provided many now well-known ballet scores during his distinguished career but, right up until the time of his death in 2003, La fille remained his personal favourite: he always called it ‘my little girl’.

Productions of La fille mal gardée taking place during 2006 include those of the Royal Ballet (ten performances in April and May), the Birmingham Royal Ballet (nineteen performances in Birmingham and on tour between May and July), Boston Ballet, the Bolshoi Ballet (three performances in Moscow in June), the State Ballet of Georgia, the State Theatre Slovakia, and the Budweis Theatre, Czech Republic. The ballet is also scheduled for major productions in 2007 at the Paris Opéra and the Stockholm Royal Opera.

Oxford University Press is currently investing in newly originated and printed performing materials, including a piano reduction: inspection copies of the reduction can be obtained from our offices or representatives worldwide. A 19-minute orchestral suite from the ballet is available on hire.

Simon Wright
Opera

Jane Eyre

Michael Berkeley’s opera *Jane Eyre* will receive its US premiere on 4 June, in a brand new production staged by the Opera Theater of St Louis, Missouri, USA.

Michael Berkeley has transformed one of the best-loved Victorian classics into a spellbinding chamber opera whose American premiere production will be staged by Opera Theater’s artistic director, Colin Graham. A strong, passionate young woman becomes a governess and falls deeply in love with her employer; her story is sketched in dreamlike sequences which focus on Jane and Mr Rochester and the madwoman upstairs at Thornfield Hall. Soprano Kelly Kaduce is featured in the title role, with Scott Hendricks as Rochester and Robynne Redmon as Mrs Fairfax. Sets and projections are designed by Erhard Rom, and Andreas Mitisek makes his OTSL debut as conductor.

There are 5 performances on 4, 8, 10, 14, and 16 June.

*Jane Eyre* was first performed in 2000 by Music Theatre Wales at the Cheltenham Festival, to great critical acclaim:

Berkeley’s sound world is spare, muted, with a nice use of tritones and wind effects, and emphasizes the similarities between the characters ... The texture is shot through with some lovely vocal writing.  

*The Times*

News

John Rutter on the South Bank Show

On 12 March John Rutter was featured in a special programme on ITV’s South Bank Show. The programme shadowed John’s activities over several months, filming him conducting choirs on both sides of the Atlantic – including one of his now regular performances at the Carnegie Hall – and working on several recording projects. John reflected on the passion for singing which has shaped his composing and conducting career, along with the musical influences and personal experiences which have led to some of his most popular works.

As the South Bank Show portrait revealed, John is always in huge demand as a guest conductor and workshop leader. Having recently returned from a week of prestigious performances in Mexico as a guest of the Anglo-Mexican Foundation, John is now looking forward to three major Carnegie Hall appearances in May, June, and November of this year, to include his Requiem, *Gloria*, and *Distant Land*.

Link: [www.carnegiehall.org](http://www.carnegiehall.org)
Two more world premieres for Gerald Barry

On 5 March 2006 Gerald Barry’s new work for string orchestra, Day, was given its premiere performance by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under John Storgårds. In writing this work, Gerald has foregone the exuberant energy of his previous pieces; in its place is a strikingly pared-down work, which Barry suggests could be thought of as ‘a landscape, in which things listen and converse.’

The composer Andrew Toovey wrote: Day, the Gerald Barry new BBC commission for string orchestra was a clear, sparse and simple work. The structure of the piece was clearly defined with insistent repetition of ideas exactly copied between the different string sections. This included a single note passed a few times between every individual player from lead violinist to back desk double bass player. The two baroquesque outbursts – or were they Barryesque? – brought a smile across the whole audience so sudden and delightful as they were. People have come to expect much of Barry’s music to be jagged, complex, foot stomping, thrusting and physical, with a highly charged energy. This work, by contrast was difficult to listen to because it pulled all the elements back to basics, so you had to listen (and carefully) without any multi-textured surface to distract you. It was like the music was naked.

On 4 April 2006 the world premiere of Lisbon took place in Tilberg, the Netherlands. Commissioned by the Nieuw Ensemble of Amsterdam, the work is written for piano and eleven instruments, and it was premiered by the ensemble with John Snijders at the piano. The Nieuw Ensemble is a strong supporter of Gerald’s music, something that is strengthened by this commission. Following on from the world premiere, the ensemble gave a further three performances in the Netherlands and Spain.

Looking ahead

• Gerald Barry’s The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit is being performed several times in 2006 and 2007. The Los Angeles Philharmonic has scheduled a concert performance for November 2006, with the Ives Ensemble planning performances for 2007. The BCMG will be touring this work as well, with performances in the UK, Europe, and the USA.

• Glyndebourne Opera is reviving their acclaimed staging of Giulio Cesare by Handel (ed. Dean and Fuller), with eight performances in August 2006.

• In June 2006 the BBC National Orchestra of Wales will give a performance of Michael Berkeley’s Cello Concerto.

• The Continuum Ensemble will perform Martin Butler’s Suzanne’s River Song on 6 June.

• The National Youth Choir of Great Britain are performing Gabriel Jackson’s forty-part motet Sanctum est verum lumen in a European tour during the summer of 2006.

• On 7 July 2006 the Sefton Youth Strings and members of the Sefton Youth Percussion, conducted by James Taylor, will premiere Hilary Tann’s Shorelines at St Faith’s Church, Crosby, Liverpool.

• On 16 July 2006 the Swansea Bach Choir, conducted by John Hugh Thomas, will premiere Hilary Tann’s Psalm 86 (Incline thine ear) for mixed choir, trumpet, and organ, at All Saints’ Church, Oystermouth, as part of the 2006 Gower Festival.

• Zhou Long has been selected to participate in a year-long residency with the Westfield (New Jersey) Symphony Orchestra, David Wroe, music director, as part of Music Alive VII, a programme sponsored by Meet the Composer and the American Symphony Orchestra League ‘to encourage the commissioning and performance of music of our time.’ The residency will take place during the 2006/7 season and will include a commission, as well as other activities to be announced in the coming months.

• Zhou Long’s The Ineffable (flute, violin, cello, pipa, zheng, and percussion) has been nominated as one of Chamber Music America’s ‘101 Great American Ensemble Works’.
Selected reviews

**Vaughan Williams**

**Sir John in Love**

English National Opera, March/April 2006

The beauty of [Vaughan Williams’s] opera is its slow-burn effect, its midsummer glow, its store of ripe lyricism, its affectionate respect for the Bard. What distinguishes Sir John in Love is the way it enfolds Falstaff in an unmistakably English milieu: the plot feels truly at home. The charm of this score lies in the nostalgic hue it casts over old England.

**Andrew Clark, The Financial Times**

Familiar words from Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* coast merrily along on an effusion of rubicund folk tunes and fragrant pastorales. When Sarah Fox’s Anne Page enters in the very first scene, you sigh just a little at the feminine beauty of the love music that Vaughan Williams so tenderly rolls out for her.

**Edward Seckerson, The Independent**

… there’s gorgeous music: Vaughan Williams in full voluptuous flight, melding folksong (including *Greensleeves*, twice) and his own modal melodies so deftly that one sometimes can’t say where borrowing stops and originality begins.

**Richard Morrison, The Times**

This quintessentially … English work is now being mounted for the first time by [the] English National Opera company. Now lush, now skittish, occasionally ravishing, Vaughan Williams’s score is accorded the Rolls-Royce treatment.

**Anthony Holden, The Observer**

**Correction**

In the last edition of Oxford Music Now, an editorial error resulted in the unintentional assertion that Vaughan Williams’s opera *Sir John in Love* had not been staged professionally for 50 years. Michael Spierman, the Artistic Director of Bronx Opera (based in the USA) wrote to tell us that his company has staged this opera twice, in 1978 and in 1988, with a professional cast.

We are happy to set the record straight and we apologize unreservedly to Mr Spierman. For more information on the Bronx Opera company and their forthcoming performances, visit www.bronxopera.org

**Causton**

**Non mi comporto male**

Park Lane Group New Year Series, January 2006

This title translates as “Ain’t Misbehavin’”, and it is to Fats Waller’s song that Causton’s beautiful textures – beautifully, poignantly played – lead.

**Stephen Pettitt, The Evening Standard**

**Erkoreka**

**Krate**

Madrid, Spain, October/November 2005

With this piece, the young composer from Bilbao swept the audience with the strength of a mind which is open both to the intellect and also the emotion.

**El Correo, Spain**

In *Krate* … the result is excellent, the sonorous aspect being of an acute brilliance.

**Ritmo, Spain**

**Walton**

**Violin Concerto**

New York Philharmonic/Maazel, James Ehnes (violin), 5-10 January 2006

Walton tries hard to please, and succeeds. He knows how to make melodic lines sing agreeably and how to arrange orchestral sound into bright and fastidious colours. He also knows how to treat good violinists, giving them a full line-up of virtuoso opportunities and making sure that every trick well executed will sound attractive to audiences.

**Bernard Holland, The New York Times**

**Zhou Long**

**The Enlightened**

Focus! Festival, The Juilliard Orchestra/Anne Manson, 3 February 2006

*The Enlightened* is no delicate-limbed beauty from the Far East; rather, it works for bigness, with series of thundering brass fanfares, rumbling timpani and great roaring climaxes.

**Bernard Holland, The New York Times**
Barry

The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant
Rayanne Dupuis, Mary Plazas, Stephanie Marshall, Deirdre Cooling-Nolan, Sylvia O’Brien, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra/Gerhard Markson
RTÉ CD 261

The music is modern but with neo-classical overtones underneath the surface which makes it more readily accessible than his more recent work. An original and fascinating opera.

Colman Morrissey

The work as a whole should be best taken as a dramatic sequence of set numbers, some of which are based on the same music. Barry also puts huge demands on the singers, as his aims are always for the performers to match the virtuosity of the instruments. This stuff is certainly not for the squeamish, but the opera has some hidden secrets which only time can unlock, and I found it so stimulating that I listened to it at a stretch.

Performances, presentation and engineering are exemplary.

Gerald Fenech, ClassicalNet.com

Barry’s music is extremely compelling in its portrayal of the emotions of the characters throughout the opera. … A host of musical techniques, including pastiche (of Baroque styles), pontillistic textures, lyricism, deftly executed contrapuntal sections, and contrasting orchestral colors, express the depths of human emotions from love to anger to self-pity to madness, and more. Barry also uses of repeated music within the opera to excellent effect.

Megan Jenkins, Opera Today

Berkeley

Abstract Mirror
Magnetic Field
Chilingirian Quartet with Thomas Carroll (cello)
Chandos CHAN 10364

The two Michael Berkeley works both express a dark intensity all their own, and reveal formal and developmental ingenuity and a richness of incident that pay repeated listening. Magnetic Field is the more experimental work, employing Ligeti-like micropolyphony and quartertones in what was designed as a tercentenary tribute to Purcell.

Matthew Rye, BBC Music Magazine

Causton

‘Opera’
Seven States of Rain
Darragh Morgan (violin) and Mary Dullea (piano)
NMC
Released in May 2006

A score that has all the energy, quirky humour and vertiginous changes of mood and direction that we have come to associate with Barry’s music. This neo-classical number opera about instinct and responsibility is bizarrely funny.

Andrew Clements, BBC Music Magazine

Chilcott

‘Ave Maria’
A Little Jazz Mass
The Chapel Choir of St Mary’s School, Thirsk/Nicholas Carter

‘Chilcott Choral Works’
Songs and Cries of London Town, The Making of the Drum, Canticles of Light, My Prayer, The Shepherd’s Carol, God so loved the world, For Him all stars have shone
The Chamber Choir of Europe/Nicol Matt Bayer Records BR 100 342

‘New French Song’
L’Enfant Dort
Katherine Durran (piano) and Alison Smart (soprano)
Metier MSV CD92100

‘Angels, Rejoice!’
Nova, Nova!
Lichfield Cathedral Choir/Philip Scriven Regent REGCD212

Erkoreka

Kin
Soinna
Inaki Alberdi (accordion), David Apellaniz (cello), Miguel Ituarte (piano), Pilar Jurado (soprano), Josepxo Silguero (saxophone)
Verso VRS 2023

‘Dark Love’
Bizitza
Halcyon

Hoddinott

‘The Art of Barry Tuckwell – a 75th birthday tribute’
Horn Concerto, Op. 63
Decca Classics 475 7463
Jackson
‘Gabriel Jackson – Sacred Choral Works’
O sacrum convivium, Creator of the stars of night, Ane Sang of the Birth of Christ, A Prayer of King Henry VI, Truro Service, Preces & Responses, Salee Regina
The Choir of St Mary’s Cathedral Edinburgh/Matthew Owens Delphian DCD 34027

Jackson makes his own statements, often with the stunning boldness of vibrant harmonies and powerful dynamics, but also with sincere, quiet tenderness. Jackson has figured out how to use such effects as clusters and other dissonant chords as defining character aspects in a larger tonal context without sounding calculated or redundant or we’ve-heard-that-before boring. It wouldn’t be going too far to describe the earliest work on this program – the O Sacrum Convivium from 1990 – as a masterpiece; its expressive power is bound in its directness, its basic respect for and understanding of the vivid impact of tonal harmony and richly coloured textural effects.
David Vernier, classicstoday.com

… a very clearly audible connection with the larger tradition of English cathedral music … with references to the harmonic and gestural vocabulary of a composer such as Walton … music of a coherently and strikingly individual personality. There’s an exuberance that runs all the way through the disc, of the kind that cannot be forced.
Ivan Moody, International Record Review

Beautifully crafted music that allows this excellent choir full rein … the sound can only be described as luxurious.
Marc Rochester, The Gramophone

Vaughan Williams
‘The Willow Wood’
Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, The Voice out of the Whirlwind, The Sons of Light
RLPO and Choir/David Lloyd-Jones Naxos 8.557798

Some passages [of The Sons of Light] are absolutely magical, such as the description of the Zodiac traversing the night sky, in the first movement. The Five Variants are delivered with no exaggerated sentimentality and with warm though not plush string tone.
Piers Burton-Pagé, International Record Review

The Sons of Light possesses a celebratory zeal and exuberance of invention that effortlessly transcend its occasional origins. Listen to out for the unmistakable echoes of VW’s contemporaneous Sinfonia Antarctica some five and a half minutes into the opening movement.
Andrew Achenbach, The Gramophone

‘British Tuba Concertos’
Tuba Concerto
Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Gourlay (tuba)/Sutherland Naxos 8.557754

The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on Greensleeves
Carney (violin), RPO/Seaman Membran 222887

Symphony No. 6
Prelude and Fugue in C Minor
LPO/Handley EMI 586592-2

Walton
Sonata for Strings
Amsterdam Sinfonietta
Channel Classics CCSSA23005

Bite and passion should persuade others to perform Walton’s sonata.
Edward Greenfield, The Gramophone

New Horizons recording:
O’Regan
‘Voices’
Columba aspexit, Gratias tibi, Ave Maria, Care charminge sleepe, Locus iste
The Choir of Clare College, Cambridge/Timothy Brown Collegium COLCD130

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Slovak Radio Orchestra/Trevor Crystal Records CD837

Lambert
The Rio Grande, Concerto for Piano and Nine Instruments

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