



Winter Fragments

Chamber Music by

MICHAEL BERKELEY



Fleur Barron
mezzo-soprano

Berkeley Ensemble

Dominic Grier
conductor

Winter Fragments

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Michael Berkeley (b. 1948)

Fleur Barron *mezzo-soprano*⁵⁻¹²
Dominic Grier *conductor*^{5-11 & 13}

Berkeley Ensemble

Sophie Mather *violin*⁴
Francesca Barritt *violin*^{4-11 & 13}
Dan Shilladay *viola*^{4-11 & 13}
Gemma Wareham *cello*⁴⁻¹³
John Slack *clarinet & bass clarinet*^{1-11 & 13}
Andrew Watson *bassoon*¹⁻³
Paul Cott *horn*¹⁻³

With

Luke Russell *flute, alto flute & piccolo*^{1-3, 5-11 & 13}
Emily Cockbill *oboe & cor anglais*^{1-3, 5-11 & 13}
Sarah Hatch *percussion*¹³
Helen Sharp *harp*^{5-11 & 13}

About the Berkeley Ensemble:

'[...] the high quality of the performances by the Berkeley Ensemble, a malleable group which [...] can adapt itself to different formats and plays as if it were truly inside the music'

The Daily Telegraph

Catch Me If You Can (1994)

- | | |
|-----------|--------|
| 1. Vivo | [5:46] |
| 2. Mesto | [4:02] |
| 3. Presto | [4:12] |

4. Clarinet Quintet (1983) [14:03]

Winter Fragments (1996)

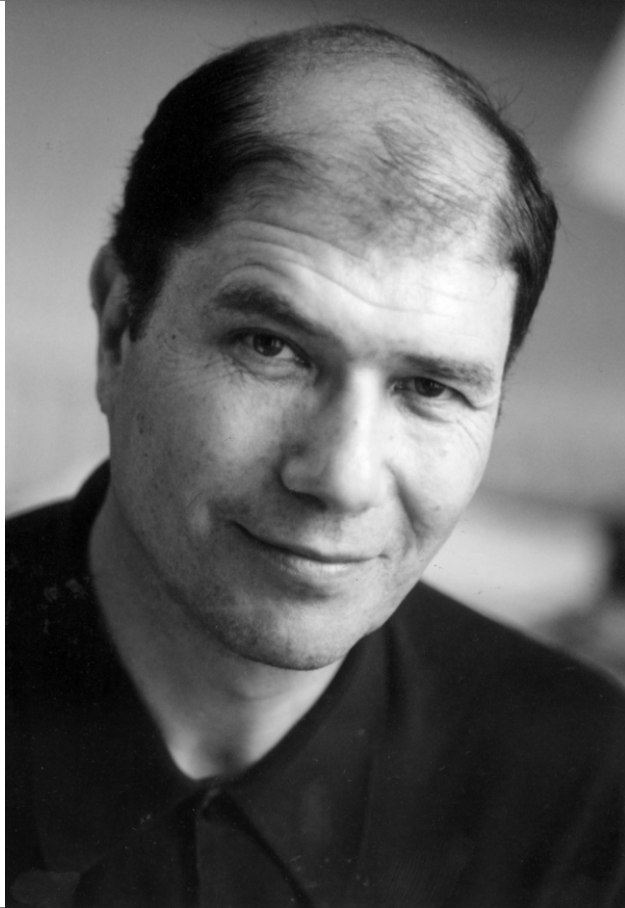
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|-------------------------------|--------|
| 5. Winter fragments the earth | [1:49] |
| 6. Death lies on her | [1:10] |
| 7. The reeling clouds stagger | [3:40] |
| 8. Frozen still | [1:31] |
| 9. A widow bird sate mourning | [1:34] |
| 10. Silent and soft | [2:04] |
| 11. Time that knows more | [3:15] |

12. Sonnet for Orpheus

from *Three Rilke Sonnets* (2010) [7:26]

13. Seven (2007) [8:23]

Total playing time [59:03]



Michael Berkeley in Conversation

Dan Shilladay: The pieces collected together on the disc span more than thirty years of work. How has your approach changed over this period?

Michael Berkeley: I came out of quite a tonal tradition with Lennox [Berkeley, Michael's father] (1903–1989) and [Benjamin] Britten (1913–1976), but then I got very interested in a more avant-garde approach to music: I worked with [Harrison] Birtwistle (b. 1934) and talked to [Witold] Lutosławski (1913–1994). I would say as a result my music moved from being fairly tonally based to being much more expressionistic. I often seem to be slightly at odds with fashion; as I was becoming more expressionistic, music was going back to the tonal world of John Adams (b. 1947) and others. But what is important in music is being yourself. That's something I discovered from being Lennox's son – that if you feel you've got something to say, that's the most important thing, regardless of what else is going on. I've always done what I felt like doing at that moment.

DS: That comes across very strongly – on this disc one might compare Catch Me If You Can, which is very frenetic

and densely argued, with the almost late-Mahlerian world of Seven. It's exhilarating to hear all these strands of your work together.

MB: As another example, in the Clarinet Quintet there is a medieval-like melody at the beginning, something I've always loved from my days as a chorister at Westminster Cathedral singing Gregorian plainchant. Plainchant is very important in my music; the repeat of notes, the modal melodies. But in the quintet, almost immediately there is very jazzy music. I don't think the audience needs to sit and think 'there's a medieval bit, now there is jazz' – it just needs to work for them, but each piece needs an organic structure in the mind of the composer.

DS: Could you elaborate on your aims regarding your listeners? You've described your own music as having 'a strong emotional content, which audiences react to'.

MB: My mother had Lithuanian Jewish blood; I think there's a part of me that responds to that in my writing, and to which audiences in turn respond in my music. I think for me, the catharsis of being moved in a piece of music is very important. You mentioned [Gustav] Mahler (1860–1911)...

DS: In relation to Seven, yes, which reminded me of the opening of the Ninth Symphony, where Mahler's simple two-note question finds some kind of interim 'solution' at its close. Your harp figure similarly seems to pose a question – ostensibly a simple one, a matter of the note-to-note tensions within that phrase – but in its repetitions, it acquires something more.

MB: Exactly. The emotion can be very distilled, in a way. It's also a bit like [Erik] Satie (1866–1925) – a very simple thing has a kind of cumulative effect. Similarly, one of the songs of *Winter Fragments* has a simple, folk-like feel to it.

DS: For the musicians, too, that movement is a relaxation, a contrast from the more heightened music around it.

MB: This idea often appears in my music, because I think it gives a moment of respite in the middle of what is often a very turbulent landscape. *Catch Me If You Can* is another example. It was written for the Haffner Wind Ensemble to take into schools, which immediately made me think of Leoš Janáček's (1854–1928) *Mládi* ('Youth'), but also the rather cruel games that children play. So even that piece has a very simple tune in the slow

movement, not unlike a viola piece I wrote, *Odd Man Out*, about the child that is excluded. Amongst all this swirling activity, you focus for contrast on the solitary individual. But the other aim of that movement – as in *Winter Fragments* – is that less is more. The frenetic activity stops and you have a very small, but hopefully beautifully crafted, touching, lyrical moment.

DS: For me, the most touching and lyrical moment of the disc is your *Sonnet for Orpheus* [from *Three Rilke Sonnets*].

MB: I think that's one of the best pieces I've written, because it's stripped down; there's no extraneous material. I adored the [Rainer Maria] Rilke (1875–1926) poem, the idea of the almost-girl who in a sense doesn't exist. I'm really glad you recorded it, as that piece gets to the essence of what I can sometimes do. There are pieces like that – often fragments in larger canvasses – where you feel that you touch the beating heart of the music.

DS: That's the subject of Rilke's sonnet: the nature of perception, if I've understood it correctly.

MB: That's why I wanted to retain the original German: partly because no translation



did it justice, but also because it lends the piece the ethereal nature of the poem, its untouchable quality.

DS: It's clear that how your music is perceived or its affective power is central to your work.

MB: And of course, a recording such as this one represents an opportunity for listeners to get a bit more under the skin of a composer. Familiarity in contemporary music breeds the opposite of contempt.

DS: As a broadcaster, and particularly as director of the Cheltenham Festival, you've done much to make the world of contemporary music more familiar. Similarly, your programme notes for your own pieces often allude to poetic or emotional content, but also to some of their technical workings, too. Do you consider these details to be important for your audience?

MB: People do respond to knowing a little bit about how a piece is put together. When you take something apart for an audience and then put it back together, there's a gleam of recognition in their eye when they hear it in the concert. To point out how a theme from a piece's opening is restated backwards at the end...

DS: – as in the Clarinet Quintet –

MB: Yes – you could ask whether that, as a technique, is interesting, but I think it is. Think of how one might talk of an artist and the way they use their palette, or how an architect creates or echoes lines in a building. We should give audiences as much as we can for them to hold on to without baffling them.

DS: But with regard to the actual technical workings of your music: do you consider these as legible, expressive and necessary, as well as interesting? (In contrast to, say, Birtwistle, whose techniques are often hidden or encoded.)

MB: I do, of course, have processes and thoughts that are not revealed. That is why the magic of music lies in its abstraction.

DS: On the question of technique, you write in your programme note to Winter Fragments that 'composers often tend to destroy words before recreating them'. Could you describe this process of destruction and recreation?

MB: You can of course take a poem – Britten is superb at doing this – and just enrich it, just lay it out as its own rhythm suggests. But I think that very often, when a composer sets a text, they need to destroy a poem

and recreate it in their own image. If it's perfect in its own way, what can you add to it? You need to walk around the back of it, or start taking it to pieces – perhaps pulling the head off and putting it on a different way. That is a compliment to the poet: to try and get into their mind, or to rewrite poetry in terms of music.

DS: And this has led you to write your own texts; there are some in Winter Fragments and also Touch Light, another piece the ensemble has played and recorded.

MB: There have been some short pieces where I just couldn't find anything that encapsulated what I wanted to say. As in the case of *Touch Light*, which was inspired by the great baroque operatic masters – Monteverdi and others – whose arias set just a few repeated words; why not just create your own? It doesn't mean to say one is by any means a poet, rather, just creating an addition to the musical vocabulary.

DS: One could view the titles you give to your pieces in a similar way. They are often poetic, but occasionally you've chosen generic or abstract ones, such as with the Clarinet Quintet. Where does the titling of a piece sit in your creative

process? Does it affect the composition or reflect it? Is it an aid to listening?

MB: By way of an example, I wrote a string quintet with two cellos for the Chilingirian Quartet, which I called *Abstract Mirror*. I thought that was a completely valid use of a title, because the extra cello could join the upper or lower strings. The two groups offered mirror images of each other in the composition so I felt that particular title worked. With *Winter Fragments* I just loved the play on the words: these are fragments of winter, but winter also fragments. I suppose as a broadcaster and avid reader I like to play on words.

DS: So, to press a point: why is your clarinet quintet just the Clarinet Quintet?

MB: To be honest, nothing sprang to mind. Titles can be useful, but they do take the listener down a certain road, which one should sometimes avoid. With the Clarinet Quintet, I just wanted it to unfold in its own way.

DS: But it's a very illustrious field. In calling it 'Clarinet Quintet' did you feel the weight of history?

MB: I've never worried about that. People



used to ask me if it was difficult being Lennox's son, and I would answer no, because I feel I'm such a different animal. We all have to stand up and be counted next to our famous predecessors. I just wanted to write the piece I was going to write.

DS: You've always done what you felt like doing at that moment.

MB: Yes – exactly.

Texts & Translations

Winter Fragments

5. Winter fragments the earth
Winter, winter fragments the earth and
stills sheer space.

Michael Berkeley (b. 1948)

6. Death lies on her
Death lies on her like an untimely frost
upon the sweetest flower of all the field.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)
(from Romeo and Juliet)

7. The reeling clouds
The reeling clouds
stagger with dizzy aim, as doubting yet
which master to obey: while rising, slow,

sad, in the laden-colour'd east, the moon
wears a bleak circle round her sully'd orb.
Then issues forth the storm, with loud control,
and the thin fabric of the pillar'd air
o'erturns, at once.
Thick clouds ascend, in whose capacious womb,
a vapour deluge lies, to snow congeal'd:
Heavy, they roll their fleecy world along;
and the sky saddens with th'impending storm.
Thro' the hush'd air, the whitening shower descends.
See! Earth's universal face
is all one, dazzling, waste.

James Thomson (1700–1748)
(from Winter)

8. Frozen still
Frozen still; a loud silence
speaking, speaking so white, so bright –
light eye cannot see.

Michael Berkeley

9. A Widow bird sate mourning
A widow bird sate mourning for her love
Upon a wintry bough;
The frozen wind crept on above,
The freezing stream below.
There was no leaf upon the forest bare,
No flower upon the ground,
And little motion in the air
Except the mill-wheel's sound.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)
('Archy's Song' from Charles I)

10. Silent and soft
Silent and soft and slow descends the snow.
The troubled sky reveals the grief it feels.
This is the poem of the air.
This is the secret of despair,
Now whispered and revealed to wood and field.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)
from *Snowflakes*

11. Time that knows more
Time that knows more
than we do has its own
story to tell.
In good time we say,
in good time all
that time has locked away
in the realm of what is
and will be will be
revealed. We must not force it
but in good faith abide
the telling, it is
out of our hands,
but not out of hearts.
Season on season
the changes are wrought. Awake
your faith now, and listen.

David Malouf (b. 1934)
from the *libretto* to *The Winter's Tale*

12. **Sonnet for Orpheus** (from *Three Rilke Sonnets*)
Und fast ein Mädchen wars und ging hervor
aus diesem einigen Glück von Sang und Leier
und glänzte klar durch ihre Frühlings Schleier
und machte sich ein Bett in meinem Ohr.

Und schlief in mir. Und alles war ihr Schlaf.
Die Bäume, die ich je bewundert, diese
fühlbare Ferne, die gefühlte Wiese
und jedes Staunen, das mich selbst betraf.

Sie schlief die Welt. Singender Gott, wie hast
du sie vollendet, daß sie nicht begehrte,
erst wach zu sein? Sieh, sie erstand und schlief.

Wo ist ihr Tod? O, wirst du dies Motiv
erfinden noch, eh sich dein Lied verzehrte? –
Wo sinkt sie hin aus mir?... Ein Mädchen fast...

*And a girl, almost, departed that
marriage of song and lyre,
shining radiant through her spring veils
and making a bed in my ear.*

*And fell asleep in me. And everything was her sleep.
The trees I have ever admired,
landscapes vast and touchable meadow,
every wonder that affected me.*

*She slept the world. Singing God, how did
you complete her, that she did not desire
to be awake? Look, she arose and slept.*

*Where is her death? Oh, will you be this theme
Still inventing before your song is consumed? –
Where does she slip away?... A girl almost ...*

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926)
from *Sonnets to Orpheus*, (Part One, No. II)



Fleur Barron



Dominic Grier



Photography: Nigel Luckhurst

The Berkeley Ensemble

Patrons: Michael Berkeley CBE & Petroc Trelawny

Hailed as 'an instinctive collective' (*The Strad*) the Berkeley Ensemble was formed with the aim of exploring little-known twentieth- and twenty-first-century British chamber music alongside more established repertoire. It now enjoys a busy concert schedule performing throughout the UK and abroad, and is also much in demand for its inspiring work in education.

The ensemble's flexible configuration and collaborative spirit have led to performances with leading musicians including Sir Thomas Allen, Gabriel Prokofiev and Nicholas Daniel.

Its recordings have attracted critical acclaim, with *Lennox Berkeley: Chamber Works* selected by *BBC Music Magazine* as 'Chamber Choice' (September 2015) and *Lennox Berkeley: Stabat Mater* nominated for a *Gramophone* Award in 2017 and praised in the magazine's initial review for 'a performance of shimmering intensity'.

The group's innovative and thought-

provoking programming has received official recognition with a Help Musicians UK Emerging Excellence Award and support from the PRS for Music Foundation. It enthusiastically champions new music, having commissioned composers including Michael Berkeley, John Woolrich and Misha Mullov-Abbado. A frequent fixture of the festival circuit, the ensemble has performed at the Spitalfields and Cheltenham festivals, and curates the Little Venice Music Festival in London.

Engaging new audiences, most importantly through education, is central to the ensemble's activities. It is currently collaborating with PRS for Music and Tŷ Cerdd on support schemes for emerging composers. The group is also ensemble-in-residence at the University of Hull and Ibstock Place School, and runs an annual chamber music course in Somerset.

www.berkeleyensemble.co.uk

Fleur Barron (mezzo-soprano)

British-Singaporean mezzo-soprano Fleur Barron is a 2018 HSBC Laureate of the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, the recipient of the 2016 Jackson Prize for Excellence from the Tanglewood Music Festival, awarded to one outstanding young singer each year, and is mentored by Barbara Hannigan.

In the 2018–2019 season, Fleur will sing Olga (*Eugene Onegin*) with Opéra de Toulon; Baba the Turk (*The Rake's Progress*) at La Monnaie; Maddalena (*Rigoletto*) with Northern Ireland Opera; and Balkis in Offenbach's *Barkouf* with Opéra National du Rhin. She will be artist-in-residence at the 2019 Ojai Festival, performing works by Stravinsky and Ives with the LUDWIG Orchestra under the baton of Barbara Hannigan.

A dedicated recitalist, Fleur continues her partnership with pianist Julius Drake in recitals in Spain and the UK, and performs additional recitals at the Oxford Lieder Festival, Two Moors Festival, Purbeck Chamber Music Festival, Blackheath Halls, Resonant Bodies Festival (US), and Sarasota Chamber Music Series (US). Future seasons include a debut with Opéra de Monte-Carlo,

returns to Festival d'Aix and the Aldeburgh Festival, and joining the Orchestre Symphonique de Toulon for Chausson's *Poemes de l'Amour et de la Mer*. Engagements in 2017–2018 included Fenena (*Nabucco*) with Opéra National de Montpellier; First Witch (*Dido and Aeneas*) with Festival d'Aix-en-Provence; Marguerite (*La Damnation de Faust*) at St Endellion Festival; and the title role (cover) in the Katie Mitchell production, *Miranda*, at Opéra Comique. Fleur was also the alto soloist in Bernstein's *Songfest* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, performed multiple recitals with Julius Drake, gave a recital debut at the 2018 Aldeburgh Festival with pianist Jonathan Ware, and presented a recital of Weill and Messiaen with Barbara Hannigan and Stephane Degout for France Musique.

Fleur was a 2017 Britten-Pears Young Artist and participated in the prestigious Mozart Residency of the Festival d'Aix. She holds degrees from Columbia University and Manhattan School of Music.

www.fleurbarron.com

Dominic Grier (conductor)

Dominic Grier is acknowledged as being among the most versatile conductors of his generation, equally at home in opera, ballet and symphonic work as well as contemporary music and orchestral training. He was a permanent staff conductor at the Royal Opera House from 2008–10, affiliated with the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme, and has since served as a regular guest conductor with many of the foremost ballet companies in the UK and Europe including The Royal Ballet, Dutch National Ballet, Ballet Vlaanderen, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Northern Ballet and Scottish Ballet.

In the field of opera, he made a critically acclaimed guest conducting début at the Opéra National de Lyon in March 2010, with the French première of Copland's *The Tender Land*, and had formerly worked as an Assistant Conductor there, from 2007–2010. He has also assisted on *Peter Grimes* at the Aldeburgh Festival and for British Youth Opera, and has served as rehearsal conductor to the Britten-Pears Orchestra. He has collaborated previously with the Berkeley Ensemble as conductor for Malcolm Arnold's opera *The Open Window*.

On the concert platform and in the pit, he has worked recently with the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, the Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Nancy, the Orchestre de Limoges et du Limousin, the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, the Orchestra of Welsh National Opera, the Tokyo City Philharmonic, and the Orquestra do Teatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro, among others. He is Music Director of the Worthing Philharmonic Orchestra.

His performances have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, France Musique, and throughout the UK as part of the Royal Opera House's live screenings, as well as having been released on DVD for the Opus Arte label. Also a respected teacher of conducting, Dominic is currently Tutor in Undergraduate Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music.

www.dominicgrier.com

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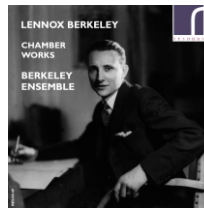
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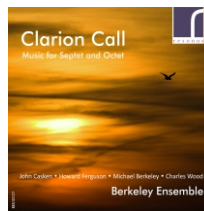


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