

Isotonic
Commissions for Clarinet
Burrell, Watkins, Boden
& Jenkins

ROBERT PLANE
BBC Philharmonic, Geoffrey Paterson
Gould Piano Trio



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Isotonic

Commissions for Clarinet by
Burrell, Watkins, Boden & Jenkins

Robert Plane *clarinet*

Gould Piano Trio

Lucy Gould *violin*

Richard Lester *cello*

Benjamin Frith *piano*

BBC Philharmonic

Yuri Torchinsky *leader*

Geoffrey Paterson *conductor*

Mark David Boden (b.1986)

Clarinet Concerto (2017)

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1. Adrenaline – With energy | [6:03] |
| 2. Isotonic – Agitated | [3:54] |
| 3. Threshold – Very slow, very delicately | [9:14] |
| 4. Hypertension – With energy | [4:08] |

Huw Watkins (b.1976)

Four Fables for clarinet and piano trio (2018)

- | | |
|------------|--------|
| 5. Lento | [4:39] |
| 6. Allegro | [4:32] |
| 7. Lento | [5:24] |
| 8. Lento | [3:33] |

Diana Burrell (b.1948)

9. **Clarinet Concerto** (1996) [21:03]

Sarah Frances Jenkins (b.1998)

10. **Shivelight** (2020) [11:16]

Total playing time [73:50]





**Isotonic: Commissions for Clarinet,
by Diana Burrell, Huw Watkins, Mark David
Boden and Sarah Frances Jenkins**

Being entrusted to interpret a brand-new work and to convert an as yet silent score into sound is surely one of the greatest privileges of a performing career. During my thirty years of concert giving it has been an honour to give the world premieres of a number of works written especially for me, by Piers Hellawell, Simon Holt, Nicola LeFanu and Benjamin Wallfisch, as well as the composers featured on this disc, Diana Burrell, Huw Watkins, Mark David Boden and Sarah Frances Jenkins. *Isotonic* is an album which celebrates the results of these four intense and very personal collaborations between composer and dedicatee.

'I dislike prettiness. I loathe all blandness, safe, pale and tasteful nice-ness. Give me instead strong, rough-edged things, brave disrespectful shapes and sounds, imperfect instruments that jangle and jar. I love both savage nature and the brutal modernism of the city's concrete. There is passion and beauty in both.' Diana Burrell perfectly describes here the gritty, yet uplifting style in which she writes. Diana and I share Norfolk as our county of birth and upbringing, and a love of its wide-open landscapes,

endless skies and raw emptiness was formative for us both. She recalls the revelatory experience of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra coming to Norwich on tour, performing Nielsen's First Symphony; 'that piece was quite unlike anything I had ever heard', with a 'fresh breeziness to it. Predominant woodwind, which I like very much'. Indeed, Diana tells that 'it is the woodwind instruments that fascinate me most of all...., on account of the strong, colourful and totally individual personality of each instrument, but also partly because of the 'creatureness' of them. Like living birds, they sing, and they must breathe, and take rests in their songs. Like the human voice too, the wind instrument is so much an extension of the personality of its player, more so perhaps than with any other kind of instrument'. When Northern Sinfonia (now Royal Northern Sinfonia) offered to commission a piece for me to premiere at the 1996 Hexham Abbey Festival and gave me free rein to approach a composer, it was Diana Burrell's music, from the gargantuan *Missa Sancte Endeliente* that made her name, to the evocative string quartet *Gulls and Angels* (Diana lists church bells, the clanging of metal in a scrap yard and the shrieking of seabirds amongst her favourite sounds) that called to me most powerfully.

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From the very start of the Clarinet Concerto, with its bounding solo leaps and stark orchestral colours, we are transported into an uneasy and uncompromising aural world. 'I have always attempted to write music in a way that celebrates primitiveness and energy – not to reflect an ugly world, but to create some life-enhancing wildness in an artistic world that has generally perhaps become rather tame'. Cast in one movement, the clarinet takes the role of a leader for much of the concerto, often in dialogue with the orchestra rather than in combat. Striking textures abound, no more so than in a ceremonial fanfare passage for brass, complete with the evocative sound of sanctus bells. The middle section opens with solo clarinet teasing the two orchestral clarinets to join in a plaintive, wistful chorale. This leads to an extraordinary passage where every single member of the orchestra is given their own solo line. 'Suddenly they are no longer part of an ensemble, but individuals, each pursuing their own train of thought in their own little world.' The composer tells that it was 'the sound of cars, people walking and talking, transistor radios heard from a motionless train on an embankment in Streatham' that inspired this complex soundscape. The soloist attempts to bring order with other-worldly sounding multiphonics, eventually

bringing everyone back together on the third attempt. The final section, a 'rough and rather primitive sounding dance' draws upon rototoms for an infectious orchestral rhythmic energy. A return of the brass and sanctus bell fanfares, now with string and woodwind support, melts into a lonely clarinet solo, partnered only by timpani and tubular bells. But the respite is brief, the concerto ending with virtuosic ascending scales in the solo line and with emphatic exchanges of a hammered-out quintuplet figure.

Following its Hexham premiere, I performed Diana's concerto extensively with Northern Sinfonia, including at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, and gave its London premiere at the Barbican before taking it to the Ulster Orchestra for its first broadcast performance. Returning to it some twenty-five years later for this recording with the BBC Philharmonic, the work has remained as vivid, poetic, original, and at times shocking as when I first got to know it.

My initial encounter with Mark David Boden's music came about whilst I was principal clarinet of BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Mark has enjoyed a close relationship with the Cardiff-based orchestra, composing five orchestral works for them in total. Mark

recalls that 'hearing BBC NOW so regularly in concert led to a really in-depth and personal appreciation of a number of the orchestra's individual players and solo voices.' This led to Mark and I collaborating on his Hebrides Ensemble commission *Between Waking and Dreams* at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama's 'Focus on Messiaen' Festival in 2016, a work scored for the same combination as the timeless masterpiece, *Quartet for the End of Time*. When Mark was approached by BBC National Orchestra of Wales to compose a piece for their ninetieth birthday celebrations I was thrilled that he suggested writing a concerto for me. The resulting work, generously funded by the Worshipful Company of Musicians, was premiered at BBC Hoddinott Hall in Cardiff Bay, with conductor Jac van Steen, in March 2019.

Although Mark and I clearly admired each other's artistic voice it was a shared recreational pastime that provided the starting point for the structure of the concerto. We were both keen long-distance runners (I have since retired from this grueling hobby!) and at the time of the work's birth I was deep into training for my eighth and final marathon, in London. The Concerto's overall form loosely resembles the physiology of marathon running, moving

from 'Adrenaline', through 'Isotonic' and 'Threshold' to 'Hypertension'. As one would expect from its title, 'Adrenaline' overflows with nervous excitement and rhythmic energy, and after a solo whip fires the starting pistol, the soloist's virtuosic reels are encouraged by wild orchestral outbursts. 'It was a luxury to be given such a large orchestra to play with, with triple wind and a full array of percussion; a true opportunity to showcase the collective virtuosity of the orchestra as much as that of the solo clarinet.' 'Isotonic' opens with *staccatissimo* fragments for the clarinet, later joined in counterpoint by stabbing woodwinds and drum. 'Threshold' is a sublime elegy, fragile and poignant, and corresponds to the rather dreamlike part of a marathon when one's heart rate remains low even when running at speed (if you've run a well-paced race!). Mark speaks of how 'at sixteen or so miles into a marathon, things get tough! It can be a time of great doubt – why do we run? Who do we run for? The third movement is written in memory of family members who are no longer with me, in addition to two musicians who were a great personal and musical influence on me, and whose loss I experienced painfully at the time of writing the concerto.' Structurally, the movement is essentially a set of spacious variations based on two interlocking chorales. Finally, in 'Hypertension' the soloist powers to the

finish line in a virtuoso display, complete with swirling runs and dancing syncopated rhythms. But the very end of the work is curiously enigmatic, a mixture of elation and exhaustion perhaps? Fittingly, the release of this album comes shortly after Mark's own debut at the 2023 London Marathon.

When the Gould Piano Trio and I, Artistic Directors of the Corbridge Chamber Music Festival, were discussing celebrating our Twentieth anniversary with a commission of a work for clarinet and piano trio, one composer was at the forefront of all our minds. Huw Watkins has an impeccable pedigree as a composer of chamber works, clearly cultivated by his wealth of experience as a leading pianist in the chamber realm. Indeed, he was the recipient of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Elise L. Stoeger Prize in 2016, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the genre. I had previously had the pleasure of performing and broadcasting Huw's 'Speak Seven Seas' for clarinet, viola and piano, with the composer at the piano. Huw is also a virtuoso composer for orchestra and has enjoyed a string of successful BBC Proms performances, including concertos for violinist Alina Abragimova and flautist Adam Walker and *The Moon*, a work for chorus and orchestra

which was premiered in my very last Prom as principal clarinet of BBC NOW. His two symphonies have been written for and premiered by the Halle Orchestra.

Huw responded to our commission with *Four Fables*, a wonderfully evocative and sensual set of abstract tales. Huw explains his approach to starting the work – 'When asked to write a new piece combining clarinet, strings and piano, I immediately thought of Schumann. His *Marchenerzahlungen* (Fairy Tales) were at the back of my mind when I decided to write *Four Fables*; I wanted to enter a similarly escapist fantasy world, but without reference to specific fairy tales.' The first fable begins in a particularly dreamy world, with a lonely piano's solitary musings. The second sets off as an ethereal dance but progressively becomes increasingly vigorous. The third is the 'slowest and most introspective – filigree piano figuration unfolding over hushed slow-moving strings.' Although the fourth begins in the same world as the first, it ends up somewhere totally different.

Four Fables was a joint-commission between the Three Choirs Festival, which hosted the world premiere in Hereford in July 2018, Swansea International Festival, Corbridge Chamber Music Festival and Wigmore Hall,

where this disc's performers gave the Covid-delayed London premiere in May 2021. They have performed *Four Fables* over twenty-five times to date, including the US premiere for the Friends of Chamber Music series in Portland, Oregon, and in a special collaboration with South Asian dance specialist Mayuri Boonham at the 2021 Lake District Summer Music, where the energy and beauty of Huw's music was embodied in both sound and movement.

I was privileged to be composer-clarinettist Sarah Frances Jenkins' teacher during her period of undergraduate study at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Sarah shot to prominence when she won the 2017 BBC Young Composer competition and, following postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Music, has subsequently been commissioned by the BBC Proms (where her *Music and Meditation* was performed as part of the Dream Prom in 2022) and as featured composer at both the Presteigne and Vale of Glamorgan Festivals. Her music has been commissioned and premiered by the BBC Concert Orchestra (*And the Sun Stood Still*), Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective (a Cheltenham Festival commission for piano quintet), Psapha, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Aurora Orchestra and the Solem Quartet.

Sarah wrote *Shivelight* for me to premiere with pianist Benjamin Frith at the 2021 Corbridge Chamber Music Festival, and is just the beginning of an ongoing collaboration. She is currently composing a new work for clarinet and piano trio for me and the Gould Piano Trio, and in August 2023 I will give the premiere of *The First Swallow* for clarinet and string orchestra at the 2023 Presteigne Festival.

The natural world is the inspiration for many of Sarah's works. *Shivelight* is a word invented by the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins in his 1888 poem *That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection* (Shivelights and Shadowtackle in long | lashes lace, lance, and pair). Derived from the Old English word 'shive', meaning 'slice', *Shivelight* evokes the splintered, fast-changing, shafts of light that pierce the canopy of treetops in a forest. Certainly, the bright opening piano fanfare (marked 'Spirited') cuts the air with laser precision. The clarinet's subsequent wide-ranging, almost pastoral musings, full of yearning intervals, sooth the mood and lead to an 'Expansive, resonant' piano figure, one which recurs throughout the work with comforting regularity. Ostinato piano figures (surely the 'Shadowtackle' of shifting, dancing shadows on the woodland floor) cast new light on the material, initially

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'Expansive, singing' but later 'Spirited, dancing' and 'Lively, light'. A floated, mystical return of the opening melody leads into a final wash of dappled piano sound, before the work disappears into the murky shadows.

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Robert Plane (clarinet)

Robert's career is rich and varied. Concerto appearances have included performances of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in Madrid with City of London Sinfonia, Beijing with BBC National Orchestra of Wales and in the USA with the Virginia Symphony. Championing new music as well as the classics, Rob is equally at home performing Christian Jost's *Heart of Darkness* with the Dortmunder Philharmoniker and Simon Holt's *Centauromachy* at the BBC Proms as playing Finzi with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Stanford with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Copland with the London Mozart Players.

Rob has tirelessly pursued a passion for British music, his *Gramophone* Award-winning account of Finzi's Concerto and *Gramophone* Award-shortlisted Bax Sonatas just two of a large collection of such recordings.

Rob has explored the clarinet quintet repertoire with a number of the finest string quartets, opening BBC Radio 3's *Brahms Experience* with a live broadcast of the Brahms Quintet with the Skampa Quartet. He enjoys a close relationship with the Elias Quartet, joining them at the Wigmore Hall in Brahms and Bliss Quintets. Rob is clarinetist of Ensemble 360 and Head of Woodwind Performance at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Benjamin Frith (piano)

Life student of Dame Fanny Waterman, Benjamin Frith won the Dudley National Concerto Competition aged fourteen, subsequently making his recital debut at the Harrogate International Festival.

Engagements with world-renowned orchestras followed, such as Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (Mehta), Warsaw Philharmonic (Atzmon) and later the Halle under John Wilson and Sir Mark Elder. He quickly secured recording contracts with ASV, then with Naxos, for whom he made a best-selling John Field Concerto Cycle with Royal Northern Sinfonia.

During the latter half of his career there has been a concentration on the chamber repertoire, principally as pianist in the Gould Piano Trio. He has formed the enterprising Frith Piano Quartet with cellist Richard Jenkinson and been guest pianist with such illustrious ensembles as the Elias, Emperor, Endellion, Chilingarian, Wihan and Dante quartets.

Recent releases include the second Piano Concerto of C. V. Stanford with BBC NOW coupled with his Dante Rhapsodies for solo piano, chosen by the *Gramophone* as one of the discs of the year 2016.

Gould Piano Trio

The Gould Piano Trio has remained at the forefront of the international chamber music scene for a quarter of a century. Launched by winning first prize at the International Melbourne Chamber Music Competition, they made a highly successful debut at New York's Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Their many appearances at London's Wigmore Hall have included the complete piano trios of Dvořák, Mendelssohn and Schubert as well as a Beethoven cycle to celebrate twenty-five years since their debut at this iconic venue.

The trio's passionate belief in the importance of developing new repertoire has resulted in commissioning works from many contemporary composers including Sir James Macmillan and Mark Simpson. They also maintain a lively relationship with promising young chamber players by giving masterclasses worldwide, particularly in association with the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

Extensive tours of America, the Far East, Europe and New Zealand have been interspersed with their highly praised recordings of both the standard works and long neglected gems from late romantic British repertoire and more contemporary works.

Geoffrey Paterson (conductor)

British conductor Geoffrey Paterson studied at Cambridge University and later at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

Highlights of Paterson's 2022/23 season include his return to the BBC Proms with the London Sinfonietta, and returns to the Danish National, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Philharmonia, Orchestre National de Lille, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and the BBC orchestras, among others.

Last season, Paterson debuted with the Frankfurt Opera with Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He returned to the Dutch National Opera in 2020 to revive Willem Jeth's *Ritratto* and in October 2019 he debuted at English National Opera conducting a highly praised new production of Philip Glass' *Orphée*. He has previously conducted at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Royal Danish Opera, Opera North and Glyndebourne on Tour.

He has assisted Antonio Pappano, Mark Elder, Andris Nelsons and Daniele Gatti on an extensive repertoire under the Royal Opera House Young Artist Programme, and for two seasons assisted Kirill Petrenko in Bayreuth for *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

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BBC Philharmonic

With a home in Salford and worldwide recognition, the BBC Philharmonic started life as the 2ZY Orchestra in Manchester in 1922. Ever since, its distinctive energy and character has helped to make the Greater Manchester region both a destination and a hub for world-class talent in orchestral music.

Along with around thirty-five free concerts a year at its MediaCityUK studio in Salford and a series of concerts at Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, the orchestra broadcasts concerts from venues across the North of England and annually at the BBC Proms. Its performances are broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Championing new music, the BBC Philharmonic has recently given world premieres of works by Tom Coult, David Matthews, Emily Howard, Outi Tarkiainen, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, Erland Cooper, Anna Appleby and Robert Laidlow with the scope of the orchestra's output extending far beyond standard repertoire.

Through all its activities, the BBC Philharmonic is bringing life-changing music experiences to audiences across Greater Manchester, the North of England, the UK and around the world.

Concertos:

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Producer, editor & mastering: Adam Binks
Engineer: Stephen Rinker

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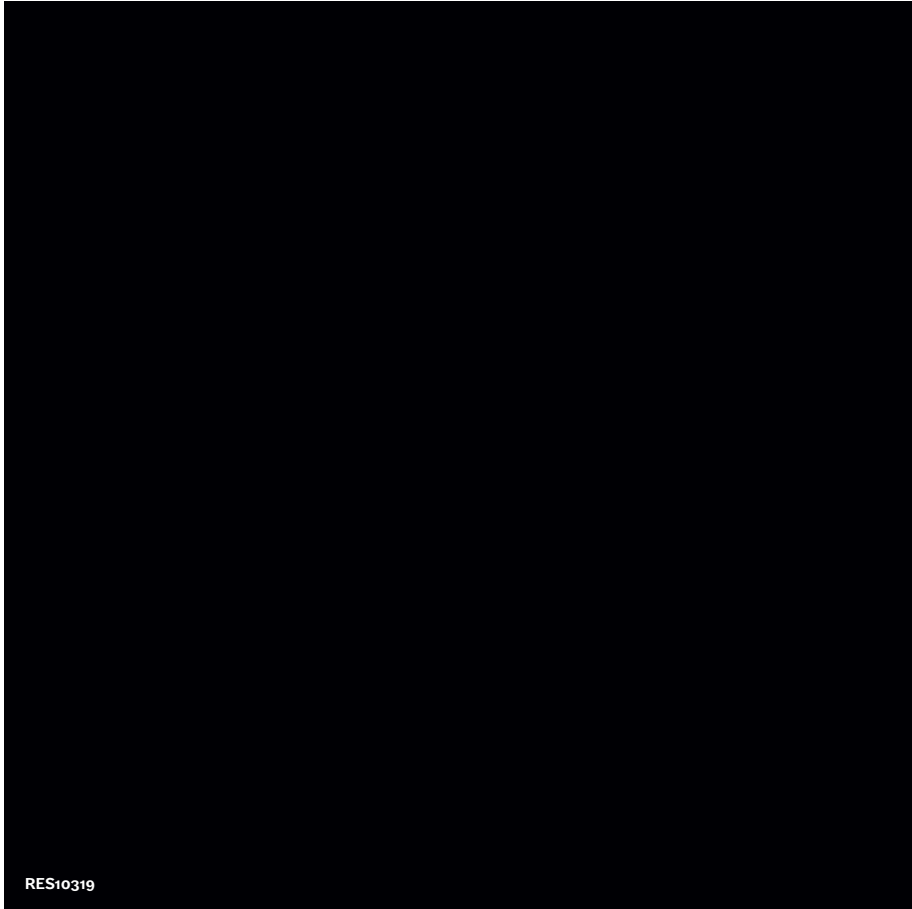
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