



resonus

Huw Watkins

Chamber Music and Works for String Orchestra

Leonore Piano Trio
Benjamin Nabarro, Rachel Roberts
ORCHESTRA NOVA
George Vass

Huw Watkins (b. 1976)

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Leonore Piano Trio

Benjamin Nabarro *violin*

Gemma Rosefield *cello*

Tim Horton *piano*

Benjamin Nabarro *solo violin*⁶

Rachel Roberts *viola*⁵

Orchestra Nova^{4&6}

Eleanor Corr *leader*

George Vass *conductor*

Piano Trio No. 1 (2009)

1. Allegro [6:13]

2. Lento [7:07]

3. Allegro molto [4:50]

4. **Little Symphony** for string orchestra (2013) [15:20]

5. **Piano Quartet** (2012) [8:32]

6. **Concertino** (2011) [12:54]

7. **Piano Trio No. 2** (2022) [16:27]

Total playing time [71:27]



Huw Watkins: Chamber Music and Works for String Orchestra

Huw Watkins is widely recognised as the leading Welsh composer of his generation. *The Daily Telegraph* describes how 'Watkins doesn't feel the need to doff his cap to the idea of "being modern", by infusing passages of sweatily dissonant, ear-bending counterpoint into his own harmonically radiant idiom. He wears his optimism on his sleeve – but because he has such an interesting musical mind, the optimism never seems facile.'

Born in 1976 in South Wales, Watkins went on to study at Chetham's School of Music, Manchester, Cambridge University and the Royal College of Music, at which institution he was awarded the Constant and Kit Lambert Junior Fellowship. Watkins' music has been heard throughout Europe and North America, with performances and commissions from the Nash Ensemble, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. He was Composer-in-Association with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales for three years (2015–2018) and has had his music performed at the BBC Proms, Carnegie Hall, London's Southbank Centre and the Wigmore Hall,

alongside many other prestigious venues. Watkins' Second Symphony (2021), a joint commission from the Hallé Orchestra and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, received the Sky Arts Classical Music Award in 2022. He was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2021 Queen's Birthday Honours for services to music; he is published exclusively by Schott Music, London.

Watkins has written much chamber and instrumental music, which forms a central part of his output, complementing Watkins' parallel career as a pianist of great distinction.

The works featured on this recording were composed over a thirteen-year period, between 2009 and 2022. The earliest is the **Piano Trio No. 1**, commissioned by Vernon Ellis for the Florestan Trio and premiered by them on 25 November 2009 at London's Wigmore Hall. The trio is cast in three stand-alone movements – the first is an energetic *Allegro*, where the piano takes the leading role initially. The slow movement begins quietly but builds to two hugely powerful climaxes. The final movement, marked *Allegro molto*, begins with the violin and cello alone. The piano interrupts with assertive chords and virtuosic figuration.

Concertino for solo violin and string orchestra, commissioned by Presteigne Festival of Music and the Arts, was premiered at St Andrew's Church, Presteigne, on 30 August 2011 by Tamsin Waley-Cohen with the Festival Orchestra under George Vass. Watkins had, the year before, written a full-blown Violin Concerto for Alina Ibragimova and the BBC Symphony Orchestra for the 2010 BBC Proms. He found the composition of *Concertino* an interesting challenge; it is a shorter, more intimate piece, designed for an orchestra of chamber proportions, where the movements run into each other.

Concertino begins energetically with the soloist playing a fast, spiky theme accompanied by pizzicato stabs in the orchestra. The music gradually becomes more lyrical leading to a serene, sustained section, followed by a return to the opening material developed at much greater length and building to an intense climax. The final section is a sad song which the soloist unfurls over gently lilting phrases in the orchestra.

Watkins' **Piano Quartet** was commissioned by the Schubert Ensemble and Spitalfields Music with funds from The Leche Trust, the Schubert Ensemble Trust and Spitalfields Music New Music

Commission Fund. It was premiered on 19 June 2012 at St Leonard's Church, Shoreditch, by the Schubert Ensemble. With a duration of ten minutes, the Piano Quartet is another through-composed, one-movement work, this time in four distinct sections. The piece begins quietly and simply, with the piano initially silent, its sudden entry propelling the music into an altogether livelier, more agitated passage. There then follows a return to the tranquillity of the opening material, before a final reappearance of the fast music, leading to an unexpectedly serene conclusion.

The **Little Symphony** for string orchestra dates from 2013 and is one of the pieces that resulted from Watkins' residency as Composer-in-the-House with the Orchestra of the Swan, created and funded by the Royal Philharmonic Society and the Performing Right Society Foundation. The work was first heard on 21 June 2013 at the Civic Hall, Stratford-upon-Avon, with David Curtis conducting the Orchestra of the Swan. In a single span, the piece alternates fleet-footed, rhythmic sections with slower, more expressive episodes that feature a florid, triplet-influenced theme. The musical material, alternating between exuberance and nostalgia, is structured to vividly highlight its contrasts and similarities.

Watkins' long-held association as both a composer and performer with the Presteigne Festival in Wales began in 2006 with the commission of his Suite for Harp and continued at the 2009 festival when he was Composer-in-Residence. The **Piano Trio No. 2**, written to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Presteigne Festival, was premiered on 29 August 2022 by the Leonore Piano Trio. A joint commission between the Presteigne Festival, Music in the Round and the Wigmore Hall, the work is dedicated to George Vass. Again, the Second Piano Trio flows seamlessly without a break, though it is clearly divided into four main sections, which correspond roughly with a more traditional four-movement scheme – two slower movements precede two fast ones.

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Huw Watkins

Leonore Piano Trio

Formed in 2012, the Leonore Piano Trio brings together three internationally acclaimed artists whose piano trio performances as part of Ensemble 360 were met with such enthusiastic response that they decided to form a piano trio in its own right. The Trio has since given concerts throughout the UK, in Italy, Turkey, Norway (at the Bergen International Festival and Oslo Concert Hall), Denmark and in New Zealand, combining a comprehensive repertoire of works by the celebrated classical and romantic composers, an unrivalled exploration of lesser-known and forgotten pieces from the 19th century, exciting and innovative performances for young audiences and a range of contemporary works.

The Trio are keen exponents of contemporary music and have performed pieces by distinguished composers including Harrison Birtwistle and Huw Watkins. Their recording of the complete piano trios by David Matthews, for Toccata Classics, was hailed by the composer as 'definitive'. In 2015 the Trio performed the complete Beethoven Piano Trios at Kings Place, London, as well as an even broader project including all his duo

sonatas for piano with violin and cello. In 2019 they finished a complete cycle of trios and duos for Music in the Round, Sheffield.

Recent highlights have included a return to Istanbul's Süreyya Opera House, the Wigmore Hall, St David's Hall Cardiff, the Royal Concert Hall Nottingham and Sage Gateshead. In August 2022 they premiered Huw Watkins' Piano Trio No. 2 at the Presteigne Festival, where they are regular visitors.

The Leonore Piano Trio regularly records for the Hyperion label and has released eight discs in as many years, featuring overlooked or forgotten works by Arensky, Woldemar Bargiel, Lalo, Litolf, Parry, Johann Peter Pixis, Rimsky-Korsakov and Taneyev, and garnering widespread praise and critical acclaim, both in the UK and internationally.



Photography: Kaupo Kikkas

Benjamin Nabarro (violin)

Benjamin Nabarro has performed throughout Europe, North America, Africa and the Middle and Far East, as a violin soloist, director and conductor, collaborating with the BBC Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony, English Chamber, Scottish Chamber and Philharmonia orchestras, among others. He was appointed first violin of Ensemble 360 in 2009 and plays regularly with the Nash Ensemble, with whom he has appeared in concerts worldwide. Concerto engagements have included performances of works by Barber, Brahms, J. S. Bach, Elgar, Glazunov, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Piazzola, Vivaldi, James Francis Brown and Huw Watkins.

Benjamin Nabarro is also a regular performer at many of Europe's leading festivals, among them the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh, Bath, Cheltenham, the Dartington Festival and Summer School, Presteigne, Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Nuremberg, where he made his conducting debut in 2012. In 2016 he conducted and played as soloist with the European Sinfonietta in a concert to celebrate HM Queen Elizabeth II's 90th birthday in Gibraltar. He has made numerous recordings for the Hyperion, Resonus, Dutton and Toccata labels.



Photography: Kaupo Kikkas

Rachel Roberts (viola)

Rachel Roberts is one of Europe's leading violists, performing internationally as a soloist and chamber musician in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Vienna's Musikverein, Berlin's Philharmonie and London's Wigmore Hall. As a soloist she has collaborated with conductors Christoph von Dohnányi, Andrés Schiff and Richard Hickox, having performed concertos with the Philharmonia Orchestra, Kölner Kammerorchester and Manchester Camerata, amongst others. She is a regular guest at international chamber music festivals, among them Salzburg, Wiener Festwochen, Schubertiade Schwarzenberg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

A member of the award-winning chamber group Ensemble 360, Rachel Roberts regularly performs and records with the Wigmore Soloists and Nash Ensemble, and has appeared with other celebrated groups, including the Tetzlaff Quartet. Together with clarinettist Robert Plane and pianist Tim Horton, she recently founded Trio Meister Raro.

Rachel Roberts is Professor of Viola at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has given masterclasses in the UK, Europe and Scandinavia.



Photography: Kaupo Kikkas



Photographer: Karolina Heller

George Vass (conductor)

English conductor George Vass studied at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and the Royal Academy of Music, London. He made his London conducting debut in 1979 and, as Artistic Director of the Regent Sinfonia of London and later Orchestra Nova, appeared at many of the UK's major concert halls and festivals. In 1992 he was appointed Artistic Director of the highly respected Presteigne Festival. As a guest he has conducted the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National and Ulster orchestras, London Mozart Players, Malmö Opera Orchestra, Bath Camerata and the choirs of Royal Holloway, Merton College Oxford and Schola Cantorum Oxford. He has broadcast for BBC Radio 3 and Channel 4 television.

Founder Artistic Director of Nova Music Opera, he has premiered operatic and music theatre works by Sally Beamish, Charlotte Bray, Thomas Hyde, Cecilia McDowall, Stephen McNeff, Joseph Phibbs, Julian Philips and Luke Styles. He has conducted *Curlew River* (Hampstead & Highgate Springfest; Nova Music Opera) and *Savitri* (English Music Festival).

George Vass has commissioned and premiered an extensive array of new work from a wide range of eminent composers and, in 2017 was awarded a BASCA Gold Badge in recognition of his continuing support of the UK songwriting and composing community. He has made over thirty-five recordings for BIS, Champs Hill, Dutton Epoch, Guild, Lyrita, Naxos, Resonus Classics, SOMM and Toccata Classics. His continually growing discography covers a wide range of British chamber opera, orchestral and choral music.

George Vass is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, was chair of the British Arts Festivals Association (2014–18) and is holder of the 2018 BAFA Exceptional Service Award. He was recipient of the Welsh Music Guild's 2023 John Edwards Memorial Award for services to Welsh Music and is a governor of the Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain.

Orchestra Nova

Founded by respected British conductor George Vass, Orchestra Nova made its debut at London's Purcell Room in October 2001. Their first commercial album, a recording of Stephen Dodgson's Concertino for two guitars and orchestra, was chosen as 'Editor's Choice' in *Gramophone* magazine.

Orchestra Nova features regularly at St John's Smith Square, London, where the group has given sixtieth birthday concerts for both its founder and for composer Cecilia McDowall. Other recent engagements have included concerts at St Albans Abbey, the Lichfield Festival and for Proms at St Jude's.

Primarily a recording ensemble, Orchestra Nova has released nine successful discs of British contemporary music, including English Oboe Concertos by John Joubert, Kenneth Leighton and John McCabe with Jinny Shaw for Guild, David Matthews' Piano Concerto with Finnish soloist Laura Mikkola for Toccata Classics, choral music by William Mathias for Naxos with the choirs of St Albans Abbey under Tom Winpenny and a critically acclaimed album of choral and orchestral music by James Francis Brown for Resonus Classics.

Violin I

Eleanor Corr (leader)
Paul Barrett
Anna Blackmur
Sophie Mather
Philippa Mo
Emma Purslow

Violin II

Francesca Barritt
Charlotte Amherst
Anna Bradley
Simon Howes
Naomi Rump

Viola

Norbert Blume
Philip Hall
Vanessa McNaught
Amy Swain

Cello

Gemma Wareham
Anna Beryl
Tom Wraith

Double Bass

Ben Russell
Marianne Schofield

More titles from Resonus Classics



Jean Sibelius: Violin Concerto, Op. 47 & Humoresques, Opp. 87 & 89
Fenella Humphreys (violin), BBC National Orchestra of Wales, George Vass (conductor)
RES10277

'Humphreys's playing is a genuine revelation in the way it brings out the music's dark and introspective qualities, with no shortage of qualities, with no shortage of technical panache [...].'
BBC Music Magazine



Ernest Moeran: Chamber Works
Fidelio Trio, Darragh Morgan (violin), Tim Gill (cello), Mary Dullea (piano), Nicky Sweeney (violin)
RES10296

'Especially valuable here is the superbly articulate and memorably affectionate advocacy lent to the disarming Piano Trio [...] this enterprising anthology yields copious rewards and can be welcomed without reservation.'

Gramophone (Editor's Choice)

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