

John **PICKARD**



Chamber Music

Piano Trio

Violin Sonata

Insomnia for violin and piano

Chaconne for solo viola

Valedictions for cello and piano

**Snowbound for bass clarinet,
cello and piano**

Rupert Marshall-Luck, violin and viola

Sophie Harris, cello

Ian Mitchell, bass clarinet

Matthew Rickard, piano

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

JOHN PICKARD AND HIS MUSIC

by Paul Mealor

I have known and admired the works of John Pickard, born in Burnley on 11 September 1963, for many years – indeed, he was my first composition teacher – and I count his *The Flight of Icarus* (1990) and *Channel Firing* (1992–93) among the most impressive orchestral pieces of any living composer. In those works, Pickard demonstrates an amazing ability to capture the essence of a musical idea and, from it, create the most beautiful large-scale musical architecture that is both original and strangely inevitable.

As he comes from industrial East Lancashire, it's maybe not surprising that his music has a gritty power evoking the rugged landscape of the Pennines. It certainly possesses a no-nonsense practicality so characteristic of the down-to-earth natives of that region. In practical terms his boyhood experience playing in his local brass band gave him a familiarity with writing for brass instruments which these days is rare in composers for the concert-hall. It has resulted in a number of works that are now standard classics in the brass-band repertoire, among them *Wildfire* (1991), *Men of Stone* (1995) – both subsequently incorporated into what may be the first-ever full-scale symphony for brass, the *Gaia Symphony*, completed in 2003 – and *Eden*, composed for the 2005 National Brass Band Championships.

Pickard's music is not bound by styles or trends; instead, it engages with the past and the present through complex but recognisable tonality that pushes boundaries without alienating listeners. Perhaps this duality of approach comes initially from his training – he studied with the outstanding Welsh composer, William Mathias, and something of Mathias' love of melody and line can be found in Pickard's work, although transfused through a much deeper engagement with the harmony of the twentieth and 21st centuries. Maybe Pickard's studies as a postgraduate in Holland in 1983–84 with Louis Andriessen helped with this harmonic transformation, too.

Awarded his PhD from Bangor University in 1989, Pickard joined the staff of the

University of Bristol in 1993 and has remained there ever since: he is now Professor of Composition and Applied Musicology there and regularly conducts the University's student choirs and orchestras, despite the competing demands of a senior academic position. He is also General Editor of the Elgar Complete Edition.

The Flight of Icarus was the first work to carry Pickard's music to audiences outside Britain, since when it has enjoyed performances around the globe. Significantly, it is a Swedish label, BIS, and a Swedish orchestra – the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Martyn Brabbins – which has begun a large-scale Pickard recording project, with *The Flight of Icarus*, *Channel Firing* and the trombone concerto *The Spindle of Necessity* (1997–98) released in 2008.¹ A second CD – with *Sea-Change* (1988–89), the Piano Concerto (1999–2000) and his most recent orchestral work, *Tenebrae* (2008) – will be released at the end of 2012.²

One might argue that through Pickard's training and early works, the organic quality of Mathias' tonality meets the angularity and aggressive drive of the Dutch minimalists, and there certainly is evidence of both of these aspects in the superb chamber music presented here. But Pickard's music is much, much more: on this disc there is music of introspection, solemnity, profundity and, above all, honesty that transcends styles and mere description. Melody, harmony, structure and drama are all here, but most of all, beauty and love of the sensuality of sound shine through.

Born in St Asaph, North Wales, in 1975, Paul Mealor has taught since 2003 at the University of Aberdeen, where he is currently Professor of Composition. His motet Ubi caritas was heard by a broadcast audience of 2.5 billion people during the wedding Ceremony of HRH Prince William and Catherine Middleton at Westminster Abbey in April 2011, and his choral song Wherever You Are reached No. 1 position in the UK charts at Christmas 2011.

¹ BIS-CD-1578.

² BIS-CD-1873.

JOHN PICKARD ON THE MUSIC ON THIS CD

The six pieces recorded on this disc span twenty years of composing, from the Piano Trio of 1990 to *Snowbound*, written in 2010. The retrospective dimension is perhaps emphasised by the presentation of the pieces in chronological order, though that decision was made on purely musical grounds – they just happen to create the most effective balance when heard in this order. The disc begins and ends with trios; in between come three duos and one solo piece.

Actively pursuing an individual ‘style’ has never interested me, as it has always seemed the most superficial aspect of composing. Style is like handwriting: it evolves naturally as a reflection of one’s personality and tastes; although it may go a long way towards asserting identity, it is usually of less importance than the content and substance of what one is actually writing. Far more exciting and interesting to me is the challenge of responding to the potential of certain instrumental combinations or to the musical character of specific performers; these considerations, rather than self-reflection, are far more likely to determine the nature of the material and the ‘style’ of a piece. Nevertheless, looking back on these works, I can discern the evolution of a number of traits over the years. Some characteristics have inevitably changed and some have remained consistent, but I think the earlier pieces are just as recognisably ‘me’ as the more recent ones.

So what has changed and what has remained constant? Certainly, a continuing re-engagement with traditional large-scale abstract forms is evident in the Piano Trio, Chaconne (1998) and the Violin Sonata (2004). Moreover, all the pieces on the disc are built on a highly extended approach to tonality. For me, tonality is not an article of faith (I am quite capable of writing music with no underlying tonal centre), but it is an enormously effective way of giving coherence to large spans of music. Much of my music tends not so much to be ‘in’ a key as constantly gravitating towards or away from different pitch-centres. Like any gravitational force, the closer one moves towards a certain centre, the more pervasive its effect (the serene F sharp major ending of the Violin Sonata [10] stands at one extreme on this disc; the restless harmonic contortions

of *Insomnia* [4] perhaps at the other). This approach offers me harmonic flexibility and, I believe, considerable emotional range. What has perhaps changed is how that emotion is directed, the earlier pieces perhaps being more austere in expression and the more recent ones often tending towards more spontaneity.

The two decades in which these pieces were written also saw the composition of four string quartets – essential works in terms of developing my general approach to writing for chamber forces. In fact, three of the pieces recorded here were written as a direct result of working on my quartets with specific performers. I enjoy working with individual artists and always try whenever possible to get to know them before I write for them – not only their playing or singing, but something of their personalities, too. A composer has a better chance of writing a successful piece if he is in tune, so to speak, with the performer for whom he is writing. One of the most rewarding collaborations I have experienced was with the Sorrel Quartet, with whom I worked quite extensively for almost ten years. For them I composed my Fourth String Quartet, which they subsequently recorded with the Second and Third.¹ I wrote three of the works on this disc for individual members of the Quartet.

Piano Trio

This work was composed during 1990, to a commission from the North Wales Music Festival and funded by the Arts Council of Wales. The first performance was given in St Asaph Cathedral, on 27 September 1990 by the Johannes Trio.

As a student I heard a good deal of music for piano trio and became well aware of the pitfalls of a medium where it is all too easy for the piano to overbalance the two string-players. It is, of course, partly an issue of individual musicianship among performers, but there is no doubt that overloaded piano textures do not help. Consequently, I took care to ensure that the piano part in this work was not weighed down with swathes of ornamentation, a consideration that went on to affect the rest of the instrumental writing, which avoids any unnecessary detail. Formally, too, the piece is clear and concise; a continuous three-in-one structure, with a slow movement at the centre, framed by fast movements, with the second functioning as a kind of recapitulation.

¹ On Dutton Epoch CDLX 7117, released in 2002.

Of the three instruments in a piano trio, it is the cello that is most at risk of being overwhelmed, and so I took a hint from Beethoven's Triple Concerto, where he tends to begin many of the sections with the solo cello as a way of focussing the listener's attention on that instrument. Similarly, in this piece the cello often leads the way – indeed, it opens the entire piece with a rushing unaccompanied scale [1] followed by a rocking minor third. Only then does the violin enter (with an octave leap) and, finally, the piano. The opening section is continually fast and comes in three waves of activity, punctuated by periods of respite. At the climax of the section the music plunges into the central slow section [2], which is initially disguised, the tempo having dropped to exactly half speed while the rhythmic energy continues unabated. Eventually, the music subsides into a more reflective span, from which the final section emerges [3] and with it a return to the fast tempo of the opening. The mood is scherzo-like, but a gradual build-up of energy and the return of material from the opening provokes a climactic passage of considerable vehemence. But at its height the music unexpectedly falters (here, once again, the cello leads the way) and, despite several attempts to restart, the energy that has been built up dissipates. At the close, though the tempo is still fast, the harmonic rhythm has slowed to that of the central section. The cello attempts to restart the piece, but the impetus has been lost and two large fermatas bring the piece to a close.

The Piano Trio is dedicated to Martin Anderson, founder of Toccata Classics and, more importantly, friend for over thirty years now.

***Insomnia* for Violin and Piano**

In 1997 I was asked by the violinist Oliver Lewis to write him a piece. The result was *Insomnia* [4], a very different kind of piece from the Piano Trio. In the intervening seven years, I had written much music, including three string quartets and three large-scale orchestral pieces (one of them my Third Symphony). The orchestral works, with their increased emphasis on instrumental colour, left their mark on this piece, which is more fantastical and overtly virtuosic than the Trio.

The title came while I was in the middle of writing the work. It seemed to sum up the restless quality of the music, the way it tends to alight on tiny details and develop them obsessively, in the same way that a sleepless night often finds the mind picking up a stray thought and worrying at it until it is inflated to massive dimensions.

The piece alternates two types of music at two distinct, but related, speeds. The first is fairly slow and free; the second faster and more rhythmic. These pairs are heard three times, with the slow music tending to dominate to begin with and the fast music appearing more as an interruption. With the third cycle, the functions are reversed: the slow music acts more as an introduction to a much-extended fast section, which eventually reaches a climactic statement, before closing with a reference to the very opening.

Insomnia was premiered by Oliver Lewis and the pianist Andrew Zollinsky on 3 March 1998 in St David's Hall, Cardiff.

Chaconne for Solo Viola

The Chaconne [5] was composed in 1998 for Vicki Wardman, who gave the first performance on 8 February 1999 at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. It is one of a number of my works from around that time (including the Fourth Quartet and the Piano Concerto) exploring structures derived from the Baroque. In this case, the great Chaconne from Bach's D minor solo Violin *Partita* inevitably offered a formidable and inspiring example. The piece has ten sections, each tracing the same harmonic journey and rising to an intense climax in the ninth section. In 2010, in anticipation of a performance at the Colston Hall in Bristol, I thoroughly revised the piece, removing the original ending and replacing it with an elegiac final section in which the music rises higher and higher until it eventually disappears into the ether.

Valedictions for Cello and Piano

This work was composed during the winter of 1999–2000 for the cellist Helen Thatcher, who gave the first performance on 19 April 2000 at Kendal Arts Centre, with the pianist Darius Battiwalla.

The title refers to two poems by the metaphysical poet John Donne, both concerned with aspects of parting and farewell. I originally wanted to set them for voice, but this approach never seemed to work and instead the settings developed into two instrumental paraphrases, which follow the meaning of the original texts in a very free way.

The first, ‘A Valediction of Weeping’ [6], centres on the idea of parting lovers, each carrying the image of the other reflected in their tears. The second, ‘A Valediction Forbidding Mourning’ [7], concerns one of the lovers going on a journey. The central metaphor is of a map and a pair of dividers with one pointer remaining fixed but leaning towards the other pointer which moves on a circular journey, ending where it began.

The work, which is lyrical throughout, is generally suffused with a feeling of farewell and loss, not least reflecting the period of its composition – on the cusp of the twentieth and 21st centuries.

Sonata for Violin and Piano

This Sonata was composed between June and August 2004. It was commissioned by the Carr-Gregory Trust and is dedicated to Linda and Russ Carr and to Gina McCormack who, with the pianist Nigel Clayton, premiered the piece at St George’s, Bristol, on 14 November 2004.

The work has two contrasting movements, but the first is essentially two movements in one: a turbulent opening *Allegro* [8] and a short, extremely fast (and ferociously difficult), scherzo, *Presto possibile* [9], based on the same material as the previous section. The *Adagio* second movement [10] is slow and lyrical and is a further transformation of music heard earlier. It begins and ends calmly and simply, rising to an impassioned climax in the middle.

The entire piece explores the tension created by the interplay of two mutually exclusive harmonic systems: one built on a scale of alternating tones and semitones, the other on an interlocking cycle of perfect fifths. The use of fifths, particularly those to which the violin is tuned, almost inevitably brings to mind Berg’s famous use of the open strings in his Violin Concerto. While gratefully acknowledging the influence of that masterpiece, I hope that my own work explores some alternative implications of that distinctive sonority.

Snowbound for Bass Clarinet, Cello and Piano

Snowbound [11] was composed for the new-music ensemble Gemini, which gave the first performance in the Victoria Rooms, University of Bristol, on 9 February 2011, with Ian Mitchell (bass clarinet), Sophie Harris (cello) and Huw Watkins (piano). The combination was a hugely attractive one for me. I have always liked low instrumental sonorities and, having recently composed a work called *Tenebrae*, exploring the darkest colours of the orchestra, this piece offered the opportunity to revisit some of the material from that work and to take it in a different direction. In some respects (and quite coincidentally), *Snowbound* is almost a mirror image of the Piano Trio. It reverses the formal model of that piece (this one is slow-fast-slow) and, in terms of sonority, it inverts it. The cello writing often lies above the bass clarinet (which is nonetheless sometimes pushed to the extremes of its upper register) and where the earlier Trio treated the piano with considerable clarity, here the instrument is often used to blur the sonorities of the other two instruments. *Snowbound* was composed in the space of a single week at Christmas, 2010, during a period of unusually heavy snowfall – at least, by British standards – when, for a time, it was impossible for me to get much further than the front garden. The piece evokes a landscape, suddenly transformed by ice and snow into a new and unexpected world, where familiar landmarks have been obscured and clear outlines and boundaries dissolved. It is dedicated to my friend Cecilia Wee.

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Rupert Marshall-Luck, violin and viola, read Music at Cambridge University before being awarded a postgraduate scholarship to continue his violin studies with Simon Fischer. He now appears as soloist and recitalist at major festivals and venues throughout the UK as well as in France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, Switzerland and the USA. His CD of Violin Sonatas by Bliss, Walford Davies and York Bowen (EM Records EMR CD001) was named as a Recording of the Year for 2011 by MusicWeb International; other plaudits for his discs have come from *BBC Music Magazine*, *Gramophone* and *International Record Review*.

As well as his busy schedule as a soloist and chamber musician, Rupert has presented lecture-recitals, seminars and masterclasses at the Universities of Bristol, Cambridge and Oxford and at

University College London. In 2011 he was appointed General Editor of EM Publishing, which published his scholarly-critical edition of Walford Davies' Violin Sonata A major in May 2012. His other editions include the Violin Sonata of Arthur Bliss, the Sonata in E flat major by Ivor Gurney, and the Five Pieces for Violin and Piano by Gustav Holst.

Matthew Rickard, piano, studied at the University of Surrey and the Royal Academy of Music where he specialised in piano accompaniment. His teachers have included Michael Dussek and Clive Williamson.

Matthew has given concerts in London, France and Holland, as well as many other venues up and down the UK. He has recorded three CDs for EM Records with Rupert Marshall-Luck. Their first disc, featuring music by Bliss, Walford Davies and Bowen was described as 'a complete success' by *International Record Review*, and another critic described the duo's playing as 'fiery, to the point of molten'. Matthew's playing on the second disc, with music by Granville Bantock and Joseph Holbrooke, was described as 'heroically impressive'. Matthew has also performed live on BBC Radio 3's *In Tune* programme, and has been instrumental in setting up a professional recital series at his local church, St Peter's, in Old Woking.

As an orchestral pianist and accompanist Matthew has worked with groups such as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Moscow City Ballet, Constanza Chorus, Godalming Choral Society, Guildford Opera, Hart Voices, Lloyds Choir, Royal Free Music Society and the Rushmoor Choir. He currently teaches the piano at Longacre Preparatory School in Surrey as well as having a private teaching practice.

A student of William Pleeth, the cellist **Sophie Harris** graduated from Chethams School of Music and the Royal Northern College of Music, where she won numerous prizes. Moving to London, she spent five years with the award-winning Smith Quartet, following her passion for contemporary music. Since then her work has diversified both as a soloist and with ensembles, performing, recording, and commissioning new cello works with a range of composers and musicians including Steve Reich, Gavin Bryars, Michael Nyman, Kevin Volans, Django Bates, Graham Fitkin, Egberto Gismonte, Melody Gardot and jazz luminary Sam Rivers. She has collaborated extensively with composer Jocelyn Pook on sound tracks for film, most notably

Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, and with Gavin Bryars on a specially commissioned trio for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Sophie is currently working with composer Julian Marshall on a series based on the poetry of Gertrude Kolmar. The CD *Out of the Darkness* with Melanie Pappenheim, on MMC Recordings (MMC101) documents the first of these projects, and *The Angel in the Forest*, with the tenor James Gilchrist and improvisations by Sophie, was premiered in London in 2012.

Sophie plays a wide repertoire in her extensive performances, CD recordings and radio broadcasts with many of Britain's leading chamber ensembles – including the Brodsky Quartet, Hilliard Ensemble, Ensemble Moderne and Lontano. She is the cellist of the Duke Quartet.

Ian Mitchell studied clarinet initially with Jock Maclean, then with Alan Hacker at the Royal Academy of Music and subsequently read Music at London University. He has performed worldwide as soloist and chamber musician, including in North Korea – the first (and probably only) British clarinettist to appear there. He has recorded with ensembles as diverse as The Monteverdi Orchestra, the improvising group AMM, the Michael Nyman Band, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Gemini and Liria, an Albanian folk band. His CD of works for solo bass clarinet (on Black Box) was the first by a British artist, and he has commissioned over 30 pieces for the instrument. Ian is Director of the chamber ensemble Gemini, well known for its concert work and education projects. Formerly Senior Lecturer in Music Performance and University Director of Music at Exeter University, he became Head of the Wind, Brass and Percussion Department at Trinity Conservatoire of Music and Dance in 2007.



Recorded in St George's, Bristol on 9 January (*Insomnia*, Chaconne, Violin Sonata) and 10 January (Piano Trio, *Valedictions*, *Snowbound*) 2012

Producer-engineer: Michael Ponder

Instruments:

Piano: Steinway Model D

Violin: Ch. J.-B. Collin-Mézin

Viola: George Craske (this instrument, was once owned by Gustav Holst and was generously loaned for this recording by The King's School, Canterbury)

Cello: Daniel Parker, 1730

Bass clarinet: Moennig, with extension by Brian Ackerman and Walter Grabner mouthpiece

Composer profile: Paul Mealor

Booklet essay: John Pickard

Cover photograph of John Pickard by Katie Truman-Williams

Design and lay-out: Peter Handley, Imergent Images, Kidderminster

John Pickard's website can be found at www.johnpickard.co.uk.

Thanks to Linda and Russ Carr; Callum McSherry; Josephine Stephenson.

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Executive producer: Martin Anderson

TOCC 0150

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Reviews of music by the English composer John Pickard (b. 1963) have stated that 'he has the technique and the temperament to emerge as one of the great symphonists of the 21st century', even that 'his place among the greats is secure'. This conspectus of his chamber music traces the evolution of his style over two decades, from the Piano Trio of 1990 to *Snowbound* of 2010, revealing a powerful rhythmic drive, a feeling for toughly argued drama and a poetic sensitivity to atmosphere to be among its most prominent characteristics.



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JOHN PICKARD Chamber Music

Piano Trio (1990)	17:44	Sonata for Violin and Piano* (2004)	18:57
1 I. ♩ = 144 –	4:44	8 I. <i>Allegro</i> –	6:31
2 II. ♩ = 72 –	6:58	9 <i>Presto possibile</i>	3:40
3 III. ♩ = 144	6:02	10 II. <i>Adagio</i>	8:46
4 <i>Insomnia for Violin and Piano*</i> (1997)	12:34	11 <i>Snowbound for Bass Clarinet, Cello and Piano*</i> (2010)	9:11
5 <i>Chaconne for Solo Viola*</i> (1998)	10:01		TT 78:35
<i>Valedictions for Cello and Piano*</i> (1999–2000)	9:25		
6 1. '... of Weeping'	4:05		
7 2. '... forbidding Mourning'	5:20		

Rupert Marshall-Luck, violin **1**–**4**, **8**–**10** and viola **5**
 Sophie Harris, cello **1**–**3**, **6**, **7**, **11**
 Ian Mitchell, bass clarinet **11**
 Matthew Rickard, piano **1**–**4**, **6**–**11**

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