



Robert SAXTON

PIANO MUSIC

HORTUS MUSICAE, BOOKS 1 AND 2
CHACONY FOR PIANO LEFT HAND
SONATA FOR PIANO
LULLABY FOR ROSA

Clare Hammond

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE, WITH SOME THOUGHTS ON MY PIANO MUSIC

by Robert Saxton

My background has been an important factor in my compositional journey since I began writing music at the age of six. My paternal grandmother, an excellent amateur pianist, came from a Yorkshire Church of England family, while my grandfather, her husband, a fine amateur singer, was first-generation Anglo-Jewish, one side of the family being from Lithuania, the other from Russia. My maternal grandfather, a Cambridge mathematician and later senior civil servant, had been born in Kraków, in southern Poland, in the later nineteenth century; his physicist cousin, also Polish, became one of Einstein's research assistants at Princeton; my maternal grandmother was from a Jewish family which had emigrated to the UK from Hamburg during the first half of the nineteenth century. Her brother, Vivian Van Damm, managed the Windmill Theatre in the London West End, and her sister, Florence, who emigrated to New York, having been a photographer for the Suffragette movement, ran a celebrated Broadway studio, photographing the premiere of *Porgy and Bess* and taking iconic pictures of Fred Astaire, Al Jolson, the Gershwins, Oscar Hammerstein II and Leonard Bernstein, among others.

I was brought up as an observant (although not Orthodox) Jew, simultaneously attending morning assembly at school (with Anglican' hymns and prayers) and religious-education classes, and so the Judaeo-Christian heritage was, and remains, essential to me, although I am not, and never was, conventionally 'religious'.

I had already been writing music for three years when my parents – my father a former army officer before becoming a barrister, and my mother, a hospital doctor – told me, then a nine-year-old, that, as they could not help me with my compositions, I should take advice. My sister (who was to become a Royal Ballet School-trained

dance-teacher and is now an examiner) and I spent much time in Norfolk with our paternal grandparents, and it was my grandfather who told me that there was a composer who lived along the coast in Aldeburgh and that I should ask him about composition. So it was that I wrote to Benjamin Britten, a letter addressed 'Aldeburgh, Suffolk', to which he replied by postcard from abroad. He subsequently suggested that I 'come and say hello' backstage at the Royal Albert Hall after he had conducted his 50th-birthday Prom. We corresponded about various technical/compositional matters over the next eighteen months and he then asked me to let him know when we were next going to be on holiday in Norfolk. He invited me (I was then aged eleven) to the Red House and gave me a lesson on a setting I had made of Gray's *Elegy*, plus accompanying my violin playing and mentoring me throughout the remainder of my adolescence. I remain eternally grateful, as I am also to Elisabeth Lutyens (my teacher from the age of sixteen), Robin Holloway (who supervised me during my final undergraduate year at Cambridge), Robert Sherlaw Johnson (my postgraduate supervisor at Oxford) and Luciano Berio, who guided me at the close of my official student years. How fortunate I was to have received such care, time and wisdom from this varied and generous quintet.

As a boy, learning both violin and piano, I wrote motets for choir, many unfinished choral and orchestral works and song-cycles. I heard mid-twentieth-century music on the BBC Third Programme, so that, before I reached my teens, I had encountered works by Webern, Boulez, Stockhausen, Maderna and Nono. Our well-stocked local library also enabled me to borrow vocal scores of operas by Berg, Henze and others. At the age of twelve, I wrote an opera, *Cinderella*, which my schoolfriends and I staged for Oxfam; with the typical generosity that he showed towards the young, Britten sent a telegram apologising for not being free to attend and wishing the cast good luck.

Looking back, I find that, even at this stage, my music tended to address spiritual/philosophical issues, relating either to the Old Testament or to the East Anglian coast – there seems to be a 'resonance' in relation to visionary and spiritual ideas. My mixed heritage has also manifested itself in my fascination with the Second Viennese School (particularly the Schoenberg of *Die Jakobsleiter*) since I was very young, alongside an equal love of the English visionary strain, from *Piers Plowman*, via

the Metaphysical poets, to Vaughan Williams and Tippett (with whom my wife worked and who was immensely kind to me). The 'cross-cultural' mix is plainly evident in the music recorded here.

Teaching has been important to me for nearly 40 years, both as a conservatoire department head and as a university lecturer: since 1999 I have been Tutorial Fellow in Music at Worcester College at Oxford University; I was formerly University Lecturer and am now Professor of Composition at the Oxford University Faculty of Music. I am also an Honorary Fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge (my alma mater) and Composer-in-Association at the Purcell School for Young Musicians. In addition, I was privileged to have taught alongside Sir Peter Maxwell Davies at Dartington Summer School and on his course on the island of Hoy, and with Oliver Knussen at Tanglewood, Massachusetts, and, through my various teaching positions, found senior colleagues such as Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter and Witold Lutosławski both generous and supportive.

For nearly 40 years, too, I have been most fortunate to have shared my life with the soprano and concert and opera singer, Teresa Cahill, who is from a Roman Catholic Irish background. Apart from the importance of the human voice throughout my musical life, our many conversations about music and other topics has informed much of what I attempt to do, alongside our shared love of Mozart and Elgar, amongst others.

Although late-Mediaeval and early Renaissance techniques, together with my tonal and serial training, lie at the root of my compositional methods, an intuitive sense of wanting to write music which is goal-directed/teleological remains vital; indeed, in conjunction with a rather visceral historical sense, the entire western musical tradition is my bedrock. The relationship between the vertical (spatial) and linear (temporal) has been the 'DNA' of my creative journey and this musical/technical ambition, combined with extra-musical ideas, has been, and remains, essential in the connection between detail and form-building. That is evident in the works in this album and, as far as I am concerned, reflects aspects of our musical heritage from Plato, via Boethius to Kepler and beyond. From my paternal grandmother's playing of Chopin to my initial encounter with Clare Hammond, when she gave a radiant and inspired performance of

my *Chacony* for Piano Left Hand as part of her Ph.D. recital, I sense that my musical voyage of discovery has come full circle. It has been a huge privilege to write both books of *Hortus Musicae* for Clare, and I acknowledge here my debt of gratitude for her commitment and dedication to my music.

The earliest work on this recording is the *Sonata for Piano* (1981) [2], which was commissioned by Paul Webster for the 1981 Cambridge Summer Music Festival and premiered by the Anglo-South African pianist Renée Reznik at West Road Concert Hall in Cambridge that year. The fact that 1981 was the centenary of Bartók's birth was in my mind as I wrote the piece, but there are no specific references to Bartók's music; rather, I tried to (re)capture aspects of the peculiar mixture of what might be termed 'fire and ice', stasis and dynamism, in his works. The sonata is continuous, tracing a through-composed background harmonic journey from the initial E, F sharp, F natural and B, the latter dyad outlining the tritone (an obvious tribute to Bartók's harmonic world) by means of varied surface subsections, to a dramatic climax, culminating in a bell-like coda which serves as a closing chorale to Bartók's memory. The final low-register E and F sharp, the opening notes of the work, are now heard again in a new context – at the close of the voyage, as it were – but are also symbolic of re-birth and renewal.

The *Chacony for Piano Left Hand* [1] was commissioned by Oliver Knussen for the American pianist Leon Fleisher, for the 1988 Aldeburgh Festival. Fleisher had lost the use of his right hand (he has since recovered) and was keen to play new pieces for left hand. His programme at Aldeburgh included Brahms' transcription (made for Clara Schumann) of the Chaconne from Bach's Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin. Fleisher asked me to write a piece which could act as an introduction/upbeat to the Bach/Brahms while also acting as a 'stand alone' work in its own right. The title is taken from Purcell (*Chacony* in G minor): the work having been commissioned for Aldeburgh, it seemed appropriate, as Purcell and Britten shared a birthday (22 November, St Cecilia's Day), to make such a reference. When I met Britten for the first time, he had just conducted his arrangement of the Purcell *Chacony* for string orchestra. My *Chacony* sets out from the note D, stating a rising whole-tone scale with omitted second degree, thereby outlining the major third which closes the work on (rather than 'in') D major with Lydian fourth

(G sharp). The initial rising scale descends gradually by thirds and, having thus stated the harmonic ground, proceeds via a set of interlocking variations/transformations, the technical/musical argument being driven by my desire for the listener to be unaware that the player is not using both hands. Subsequent recordings of the *Chacony* were made by Leon Fleisher (Sony Classical), John McCabe (NMC) and Steven Neugarten (Metier).

The Latin *Hortus Musicae* is indicative of the conception and nature of my twelve-piece cycle. Whereas *Hortus Musicus* might literally mean ‘a musical garden’, *Hortus Musicae* (‘a Garden of Music’) has allegorical/metaphysical implications, the entire set addressing the idea of the garden as a ‘sacred space’. Both books were written for, and are dedicated to, Clare Hammond, the first being commissioned by Ian Ritchie for the 2013 City of London Festival with funds provided by the John S. Cohen Foundation. Clare premiered the second book, with funds from the RVW Trust, at the 2016 Presteigne Festival, where I was Composer-in-Residence at the invitation of the festival director, George Vass.

Book 1 consists of five pieces, the pitch centres of each being as follows: E, B, G, D, A, that is, interlocking ascending perfect fifths, delineating a pentatonic collection. The final piece outlines/summarises the entire pitch-centre succession.

– ‘Hortus Somniorum’ (‘The Garden of Dreams’/‘The Visionary Garden’) [3], a fleeting vision of a ‘magical’ garden

– ‘Hortus Temporis’ (‘The Garden of Time’) [4], a reflection on the floral clock described by Andrew Marvell (1621–78) in his poem ‘The Garden’:

How well the skilful gardener drew
Of flowers and herbs this dial new,
Where from above the milder sun
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;
And, as it works, the industrious bee
Computes its time as well as we.
How could such sweet and wholesome hours
Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers!

- ‘Hortus Cantus’ (‘The Singing Garden’) [5]: nature sings/praises, in the manner of a chorale prelude and ending with the *cantus firmus* at its core, transformed into a bell-like coda
- ‘Hortus Infinitatis’ (‘The Infinite/Eternal Garden’) [6], a meditative/formal garden representing Time suspended, in the form of a palindromic prolation canon combined with an harmonic ground (chaconne)
- ‘Saltatio Hortensis’ (‘The Garden/Nature Dances’) [7], a summer garden of dancing, celebratory nature. Its essence is summed up in words spoken by Miranda in W. H. Auden’s 1944 *Tempest*-inspired poem ‘The Sea and the Mirror’:

So, to remember our changing garden, we
Are linked as children in a circle dancing.

Hortus Musicae, Book 2, consists of seven pieces, the fundamental pitch of each being a perfect fifth higher than its predecessor. The pitch-centres of the two books as a whole complete the total chromatic, the ‘tonic’ of the final piece, B flat, being a tritone from the E centre of the first piece in Book 1.

- ‘The Flowers appear on the Earth’ [8]: the reference is to the Song of Solomon (Chapter 2, Verse 12). The idea of spring and new growth/re-birth leads to
- ‘Light on the Water Garden’ [9]: when light passes through another medium, it slows and ‘bends’/changes angle (refraction). In this piece, the pulse remains constant (as does the speed of light), the initial active, bright soundscape being interrupted by apparently slower, quiet music. Each gradually changes, the music ending with a final burst of light which is harmonically suggestive of a journey/trajectory to be continued.
- ‘The Garden of Changing Perspective’ [10]: a melodic line is heard in changing perspective; not only is the line itself transposed, but it also accumulates reflections of itself. After reaching a point of intense harmonic and textural density, the music subsides, arriving at the pitch centre which it has sought throughout.
- ‘Beech Bank (à la recherche)...’ [11]: in the late 1950s and early 1960s, my sister and I spent much time at our paternal grandparents’ house, Beech Bank, in Norwich. Our grandmother played Chopin on the piano and our grandfather sang excerpts from

various operas. In addition, he played us records, and the first one I recall was a 78rpm of the slow movement and Minuet and Trio of Haydn's String Quartet, Op. 76, No. 1. In this piece in the cycle, the continuous music represents a veil of passing time (hence the reference to Proust's great novel concerned with love, loss and the nature of memory) through which are heard quotations from (remembered) music by Haydn, Chopin and Donizetti, imagined floating through the window into Beech Bank garden.

– 'Light on the Hedgerows' [12]: as light is diffracted, the amount of diffraction depends on the size of the aperture through which it passes, the smallest, for example, causing the widest diffraction. The music reflects this law of physics with three elements: the first is that of the light itself, the second is the increasingly closely spaced interrupting chords and the third, the waves of diffraction, each wave being a re-harmonisation of the central pitch by means of various transpositions of the harmonic series. This movement 'mirrors' the second piece in Book 2.

– 'The Garden at Dusk' [13]: a slowly descending harmonic succession is heard, in which cluster chords are reduced to triads and 'mirror' the third piece ('The Garden of Changing Perspective').

– 'Hortus Animae Alis Fugacis' ('The Garden of the Swift-Winged Spirit') [14]: an imaginary garden of flights of the mind, cast as an unorthodox fugue (*fuga* in Latin can be translated as either 'flight' (from *fugere*) or 'chase' (*fugare*)). As the last in the cycle, this piece is paired in character and in conception with the closing piece of Book 1.

Lullaby for Rosa (2016) [15]: this brief piece was written as a 'welcome' gift for Clare Hammond and her husband Peter's new daughter, Rosa. It is in E flat, deriving that pitch from the name 'roSa'.

Hailed as a pianist of ‘amazing power and panache’ (*The Daily Telegraph*), **Clare Hammond** is recognised for the virtuosity and authority of her performances and has developed a ‘reputation for brilliantly imaginative concert programmes’ (*BBC Music Magazine*, ‘Rising Star’). In 2016, she not only won the ‘Young Artist Award’ of the Royal Philharmonic Society in recognition of outstanding achievements but also performed with the Philharmonia at the Royal Festival Hall and curated a series of concerts at the Belfast International Arts Festival, later broadcast for ‘Lunchtime Concerts’ on BBC Radio 3.

Clare is a champion of modern repertoire: this is her sixth album of music by a living composer. Earlier releases, of études and of music by Kenneth Hesketh, have been praised for ‘unflinching bravura and conviction’ (*Gramophone*), with *The Observer* describing her as a ‘star interpreter of contemporary music’. She has given 35 world premieres to date, including those of major works by Robert Saxton, Michael Berkeley, John McCabe and Arlene Sierra.

In 2017 Clare performed Edwin Roxburgh’s *Concerto for Piano and Winds* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Seal. She will shortly make first recordings of two keyboard concertos by Josef Mysliveček with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Nicholas McGegan for BIS Records. BBC Radio 3 and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra have recently co-commissioned Kenneth Hesketh to write a concerto for Clare, to be premiered in 2019 with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

Clare completed a BA at Cambridge University, where she obtained a double first in music, and undertook postgraduate study with Ronan O’Hora at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Her website can be found at <http://clarehammond.com>.





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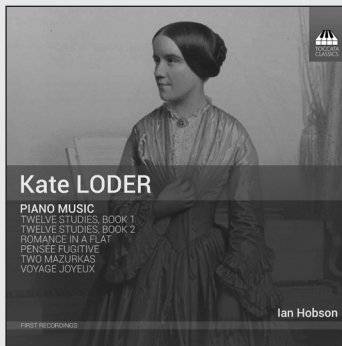
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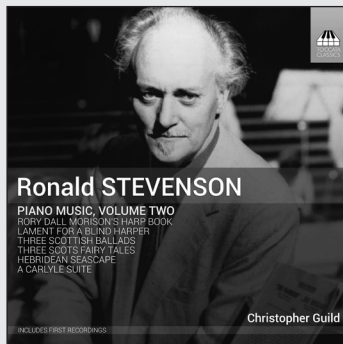
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ROBERT SAXTON Piano Music

1	<i>Chacony for Piano Left Hand</i> (1988)	6:27
2	<i>Sonata for Piano</i> (1981)	10:40
	<i>Hortus Musicae, Book 1</i> (2013)*	16:27
3	I Hortus Somniorum	1:28
4	II Hortus Temporis	2:28
5	III Hortus Cantus	4:14
6	IV Hortus Infinitatis	5:25
7	V Saltatio Hortensis	2:52
	<i>Hortus Musicae, Book 2</i> (2015)*	20:57
8	I The Flowers appear on the Earth	3:05
9	II Light on the Water Garden	2:17
10	III The Garden of Changing Perspective	2:10
11	IV Beech Bank (à la recherche)...	3:08
12	V Light on the Hedgerows	2:18
13	VI The Garden at Dusk	3:06
14	VII Hortus Animae Alis Fugacis	4:53
15	<i>Lullaby for Rosa</i> (2016)*	1:12

TT 55:44

Clare Hammond, piano

*FIRST RECORDINGS