

Corentin BOISSIER

TWO PIANO CONCERTOS AND A SONATA

PHILIP MARLOWE CONCERTO

SONATA APPASSIONATA

GLAMOUR CONCERTO

Valentina Seferinova, piano
Ukrainian Festival Orchestra
John McLaughlin Williams

THE MUSIC OF CORENTIN BOISSIER

by Walter Simmons

Corentin Boissier is one of the most remarkable composers to appear on the new-music scene in the 21st century. He is remarkable not only for his precocity but also for the musical language that has underlain and inspired much of his work.

Boissier was born in the Parisian suburb of Suresnes in 1995. He was home-schooled by the CNED (Centre National d'Éducation à Distance), both of his parents being cultured and devoted to the arts. Realising how motivated he was, they allowed him to progress at his own pace. His father introduced him to classical music when he was two years old, allotting an hour per day to listening. These sessions awakened in him a voracious interest in discovering new pieces, and became a habit that he follows to this day. Boissier recalls that his father would play him

hundreds of short, simple, and melodic pieces – often extracts from more ambitious works – for which he made up catchy titles such as ‘Walk in the Park’, ‘Canoe Trip’ and ‘The Little Train’. As a result I came to know and appreciate more and more classical music – including some works by the great composers whom I admire today. One of my favourite pieces was ‘Saturn Rocket Lift Off’. Not until I was several years older did I learn that this was the famous introduction to Richard Strauss’ *Also sprach Zarathustra*. When I was about eight years old, my father introduced me to *Le sacre du printemps* and I loved it immediately.¹

He began composing at the piano when he was six. His father encouraged this method, so that the youngster could always physically hear the music that was in his mind, instead of thinking of it apart from its direct aural impact. While still a child,

¹ Interview with the composer, January 2021.

he was discovered by the composer and organist Thierry Escaich, who later became one of his teachers. Escaich wrote that at age nine

Corentin already possesses qualities that portend his becoming an accomplished musician: a genuine sense of harmonic colour, of rhythmic invention, and an understanding of the process of thematic development. All these qualities point to a free spirit with a true gift for musical composition.²

In 2012 Boissier entered the Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional (CRR) of Paris, where he studied musical writing (harmony, counterpoint and fugue) and orchestration, graduating ‘with highest distinction’. He continued his education, entering the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique (CNSM) of Paris in 2015. There he earned a Master’s degree in musical writing in 2019, again ‘with highest distinction’, and in 2021 a Master’s degree in orchestration. Among his most important teachers were Anthony Girard, Fabien Waksman and Thierry Escaich – although he is clear that his inspiration and aesthetics are his own.

Many composers show little interest in the music of others, but Boissier’s musical appetites, by contrast, are enormous. He identifies more than 100 composers as ‘special favourites’,³ and he has uploaded several thousand little-known orchestral works onto YouTube. On his website, corentinboissier.net, he has created what he calls an ‘Ideal Discotheque’ of more than 1,700 ‘orchestral works of feelings’.⁴ His extraordinary Master’s thesis is entitled *The Mini Piano Concerto from the Years ’40–’60: A Trend Triggered by Richard Addinsell’s ‘Warsaw Concerto’*. In it he establishes, for the first time, a catalogue of some 300 forgotten works that fall into this category.

Committed to pursuing a clear, accessible approach to classical music, Boissier has composed more than thirty works that embrace a Neo-Romantic style. His Piano Sonata No. 2, *Appassionata*, was premiered in February 2018 by Célia Oneto Bensaid at the Salle Cortot in Paris. His Sonata for Cello and Piano was premiered by the American

² Letter to Denis Boissier, dated 26 August 2004.

³ Interview with the composer, January 2021.

⁴ <https://www.corentinboissier.net/musicology>.

cellist Eric Tinkerhess and was subsequently performed by Jordi Albelda and Nicolas Licciardi in the last concert of the festival Cambra Romànica 2019 (in the Principality of Andorra). His suite for guitar *Don Juan Serenade* was premiered by Gabrielle Rubio in August 2019 during the Music Festival of La Llagonne (Pyrénées-Orientales), and his Sonata for Flute and Piano was recorded by the flautist Gladys Avignon in 2020.

Boissier has also pursued an interest in orchestration and other types of arranging. His orchestration of the last of Alfredo Casella's Nine Pieces for Piano, Op. 24, was performed by the Orchestre des Gardiens de la Paix in 2016 at the Église-St-Joseph-des-Nations in Paris; his orchestration of Debussy's 'Passepied' (the last of the four movements of the *Suite bergamasque*) was performed at the Auditorium Marcel Landowski in central Paris; and his arrangement of the Juan Tizol/Duke Ellington jazz standard *Caravan* was performed by the Local Brass Quintet at the Tuileries Gardens in 2017. His fellow-composer Nicolas Bacri wrote of his orchestration of Francis Poulenc's *Humoresque*: 'Congratulations! Your orchestration is very well done and perfect in style.'⁵ In 2019 the Association Le Capil for the Promotion of the Heritage of La Llagonne⁶ named Boissier Artistic Coordinator, responsible for chamber-music concerts every summer.

Walter Simmons, musicologist and critic, has written extensively on composers who maintained an allegiance to traditional musical values. He is the editor of a series of books, 'Twentieth Century Traditionalists', published by Rowman and Littlefield. He wrote the first two volumes himself (under the Scarecrow Press imprint): Voices in the Wilderness: Six American Neo-Romantic Composers (2004), which treated the lives and works of Barber, Bloch, Creston, Flagello, Giannini and Hanson, and Voices of Stone and Steel: The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin (2011).

⁵ E-mail dated 2 June 2015.

⁶ A commune in the Pyrénées-Orientales department in south-western France

LIVING MUSIC AND THE VALUES OF THE PAST

by Corentin Boissier

A living artist does not have to be modern – or to want to be modern. He is naturally modern as a consequence of living today. My view of modernity is not about denying or forgetting the past, but about being able to create something new and individual without rejecting the principles and techniques of the past.

I believe that it is important for a young composer to explore the styles that preceded him, especially if there is no clearly defined style that represents music today. A young composer should seek a deep understanding and develop a fluency in the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionist (*et al.*) styles in order to arrive at his or her own style. To seek one's own style right from the start runs the same risk as the traveller in a hurry who boards the first train at the station without knowing whether it is the one that will get him to where he wants to go.

Some critics cannot appreciate music that was composed in a style not deemed to be that of the composer's own era. For example, if I compose a piano concerto in the post-Romantic style of Rachmaninov, some commentators may reject the work, saying that it is from another time, that it is no longer useful or relevant. The composer is dismissed for choosing to reconnect with the values of music from the past. But isn't it possible to appreciate a work for its own intrinsic value? Can we no longer judge a work solely for its beauty, for its stylistic consistency, regardless of other factors?

Both the *Glamour Concerto* and the *Philip Marlowe Concerto* reflect my love for the music of the Hollywood Golden Age. The *Glamour Concerto*, composed for solo piano in 2012 and orchestrated in 2016, must be appreciated in the spirit of Hollywood film music of the 1940s. (I often perform the first movement of the *Glamour Concerto* in its solo-piano version.) Each of its three movements is written

like a ‘tabloid concerto’, some of the best and most famous examples of which are Richard Addinsell’s *Warsaw Concerto* (1941), Franz Waxman’s *Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra* from his score for *The Paradine Case* (1947), and Leith Stevens’ Piano Concerto written for the film *Night Song* (1947).

The first movement of the *Glamour Concerto*, entitled ‘Glamour appassionato’ [1], suggests the story of a young man and a young woman meeting in New York and falling in love. This movement is written in a free tri-thematic sonata form. The first theme gradually takes shape in the tumultuous introduction in a minor key, before being fully and brightly stated by the piano in A major. The second theme, more tender and warm-hearted, is first played by the strings, after a *diminuendo* in which the first subject gradually fades out. The third theme, in A minor, is more restless and agitated during its exposition, though its return towards the end of the movement is now solemn and majestic. The final *maestoso* peroration follows. Instead of the usual tonal relationships, the whole movement highlights an interplay between the distant keys of A (minor/major) and D flat major.

The listener might imagine the second movement, ‘Manhattan Waltz-Romance’ [2], as a romantic dinner in a Manhattan restaurant as the young couple’s love grows deeper, suggested by the waltz tempo. Its lyrical main theme, introduced by a solo English horn and subsequently picked up by the violins, then by the trumpets, permeates the whole movement, though alternating with several episodes, until its final appearance, played by the whole orchestra, culminates in a more animated and affirmative treatment of the waltz.

The last movement, ‘Spanish Lovers in Brooklyn’ [3], evokes a Hispanic neighbourhood in the famous borough in New York City. It is here that the couple becomes one in body, as the atmosphere becomes increasingly passionate. This movement is shaped as a large-scale *crescendo*, begun by a mysterious piano solo in the dark key of E flat minor. The Hispanic flavour gradually builds, through a *crescendo* which culminates in an animated cadenza-like passage that leads to a fiery restatement of the warm-hearted second theme of the first movement. Finally, the Spanish motif is intertwined with thematic elements from the previous movements until it bursts forth triumphantly in both piano and orchestra during the peroration.

The *Glamour Concerto* is scored for a standard orchestra with double woodwinds, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

The *Philip Marlowe Concerto*, written in 2013 and revised in 2018, is a homage to the music of the *film noir* of the 1950s – music that is more violent and *staccato*, where the abrupt orchestration features prominent use of the brass. In order to accentuate this effect, the orchestral forces include no woodwinds – only brass, strings, timpani, percussion and harp.

This concerto evokes the life of the famous private detective created by the American novelist Raymond Chandler, who was responsible for such films as *Murder, My Sweet* and *The Big Sleep*. In these films the role of Philip Marlowe was played by Dick Powell, Humphrey Bogart and Robert Mitchum.

The concerto is shaped as three linked movements that form a large-scale sonata form with an inverted recapitulation. The first movement, *Allegro drammatico* [7], serves as a rhapsodic exposition section, the piano stating the dramatic first theme after a brief but forceful orchestral introduction – a kind of ‘main title’. The second theme is more lyrical, like a love theme: the meeting of the detective and the ‘femme fatale.’ The *Lento* second movement [8] encompasses both the development and the lyrical recapitulation of the second theme, which undergoes a variety of transformations. Most of the development is a dark passacaglia that features the interplay of a solo trumpet with the piano. The finale, *Allegro feroce* [9], begins with a powerful recapitulation of the first theme, followed by an extended coda in a restless *tempo di toccata*, during which all the thematic, rhythmic and motivic elements from the whole concerto are combined in a struggle, colliding with one another until the drama reaches a memorable (one hopes) conclusion.

It is always difficult to describe one’s own compositions. I simply hope that they express my passion for classical music – Romantic music in particular, from Chopin to Rachmaninov, from Ravel to Barber, which I have loved as far back as I can remember. It was in this frame of mind that I wrote my Piano Sonata No. 2, *Appassionata*, in 2015. It is a work that seeks to speak from the heart of the composer to the soul of the listener.

The *Allegro impetuoso* first movement [4] – by far the longest of the three – is not a strict sonata form: it is cast in a grand-fantasy form with constant metamorphosis of the two main thematic elements. In contrast, the slow movement, *Andante espressivo* [5], is written in a compact sonata form. The first theme is a long *cantabile* melody accompanied by peaceful triadic arpeggios. The second-subject group is largely harmonic, consisting of a chromatic descent followed by a more lyrical outpouring. Both melodic and harmonic features alternate and combine throughout the movement. The finale, *Allegro appassionato* [6], is also in sonata form, with both thematic groups competing in passion and impetuosity. The development section may be divided into three parts: a sweet reminiscence of an element from the first movement; a fiery *habañera*-like passage; and a dramatic segment during which both principal themes of the movement are played simultaneously. The sonata culminates in a virtuosic recapitulation and coda.

My ambition in this sonata is to evoke sounds, sensations and feelings. I never seek originality at all costs but, rather, sincerity. After all, when we look at the clouds or the sea, when we smile or when we take a walk, we are not forming a theory: we are tasting the present moment.

To put it simply, I write the music I love.

CORENTIN BOISSIER IN INTERVIEW

by Anna Sutyagina

This interview was conducted in June 2019 for Moving Classics TV and first published on their website, <https://movingclassics.tv>.

What does music mean to you personally?

For me, classical music is essential – a link between my inner life and my daily life. At first, music was a vocation; now it's a way of existing.

Do you agree that music is really about fantasy?

Composition is partly fantasy and partly theory. I would say it is fantasy relying on theory (in French, music theory is called *solfège*). I prefer the word ‘inspiration’ to ‘fantasy’. Nobody knows where inspiration comes from, but it stimulates and channels the fantasy. Inspiration is the most important thing in all artistic creations.

If you were not a professional musician, what would you have been?

A non-professional musician! I’m only half-joking; since the age of six, I have never been interested in anything other than classical music, in the broadest sense of the term. It is a field that is so immense that ten lifetimes wouldn’t be enough to know all there is to know.

The audience for classical music is getting old; are you worried about the future?

I’m very worried indeed, and I know every sensible composer is. For sociological reasons, poetry and spirituality gradually disappeared from our society, and classical music is moving in the same wrong direction. The classical-music audience is shrinking more and more. But what worries me the most is that, for more than sixty years, tonal composition has not been taught in the major music schools, such as the Paris Conservatoire, where I earned my Master’s degrees. Only experimental and electroacoustic composition is taught. This kind of composition is not intended to attract a large audience, which has been collapsing for more than thirty years.

What do you envisage the role of music to be in the 21st century? Do you foresee a transformation of its role?

In modern society, music has become only a background: a physiological stimulus often linked to violence and other forms of excess. At best, it allows people to overcome their fear of silence. Media broadcast only the kind of music that interests the most people. Consequently, nowadays, classical music is only one kind of music among dozens and dozens of others. Its past, its glory, and its masterworks are now vanishing from collective memory. More and more orchestras are being disbanded, and many young men and women don’t even know what an organ is, or who Rachmaninov was!

Because of this difficult context, do you think that today's musician needs to be more creative? What is the role of creativity in the musical process for you?

If a classical composer wants to live from his music, yes, he must be far more 'creative', which means he must stop writing the music he loves, and he must adapt himself to his time, by being involved in multidisciplinary projects. Is it being more 'creative'? Personally, I don't think so.

Do you think musicians can do something to attract the younger generation to classical concerts? How would you do this?

We must begin educating people to appreciate classical music from childhood, and in school. But a degree of deep understanding is necessary, and I think it is not likely to happen.

Tell us about your creative process. What is your favourite piece among your own works?

My 'favourite piece' has yet to come. For me, composing – whatever the duration, the form, or the instrumentation – is a way to engage the interest of the listener, to give him pleasant feelings and lasting emotions. Open-mindedness and self-criticism are two essential components. Inspiration comes first, then comes serious work, then the finishing touches, in order to produce an understandable and meaningful composition.

Can you give some advice to young people who want to discover classical music by themselves?

Nowadays young people can use the countless resources of the Web. In particular, YouTube provides a gigantic number of videos in which the worst can be found alongside the best. As for me, I appreciate YouTube so much that I run the musical channels collectionCB, collectionCB2, collectionCB3, collectionCB4 and collectionCB5, on which I have uploaded, to date, more than 2,600 videos featuring little-known tonal orchestral compositions of the twentieth and 21st centuries. On my website, I also present my 'Ideal Discotheque of more than 1,700 orchestral works of feelings'.

Do you think about the audience when composing?

My first audience is myself, as a music-lover who needs to be engaged. I think each composer should be, above all, a fervent music-lover. One needs to be passionate about music written by other composers in order to feel the necessity of arousing the passions of others with one's own compositions.

Anna Sutyagina is a concert pianist and the founder and content-creator of a popular curated discovery channel for modern piano music, Moving Classics TV. Born in Tomsk, in Siberia, she received her first piano lessons at the age of five from her mother. She studied piano and literature both in Tomsk and abroad, in Oklahoma and Frankfurt am Main. Private studies and master-classes followed, with Volker Banfield, Marina Horak, Matthias Kirschner and Ewa Kupiec. She has lived and worked in Munich since 2005.

The Bulgarian pianist **Valentina Seferinova** gave her first public performance at the age of eight, and her first performance as soloist with an orchestra when she was twelve, playing Haydn's D major Concerto with her hometown orchestra, the Vidin Philharmonic. She studied under Lubomir Dinolov at the Bulgarian State Conservatoire in Sofia, later becoming Assistant Professor of Performance. A frequent performer on Bulgarian National Radio and Television, she developed a reputation that spread beyond Bulgaria for her performances of works of the Romantic era, and led in 1999 to the honour of being invited to give the annual anniversary recital, along with fellow pianist Emilia Mihaylova, at the Claude Debussy House and Museum in St Germain-en-Laye. This engagement was quickly followed by an invitation to give a private solo performance under the auspices of



Photograph: Anthony Cheng

the International Rachmaninoff Society. She was subsequently invited to give three further recitals for the Society (in 1999, 2005 and 2009) – including one in London in the presence of two of the composer's great-grandchildren, which earned her a standing ovation.

Her career continued with performances across Europe, Russia and Turkey. She quickly garnered a reputation for performing not only the classics but also for championing neglected composers whose works she felt had been unjustly ignored. Such an interest and reputation resulted in recording contracts with a number of European record companies, chief amongst them the Polish label Acte Préalable, with which she has recorded five albums of music by Zygmunt Noskowski and the complete solo-piano music of Ludomir Różycki. She now lives in the UK, where, among her teaching responsibilities, she is a lecturer on the music faculty of Southampton University.

valentinaseferinova.com

A series of recordings on the Naxos label has brought the conducting of Grammy winner **John McLaughlin Williams** to international attention. 'John McLaughlin Williams delivers absolutely masterful and deeply engrossing readings', wrote Paul Snook in *Fanfare*. The French magazine *Diapason* described his recordings as among 'the most beautiful florets of the American collection of Naxos, and a conductor whom one hopes to hear again often'. Other publications have sung his praises, among them *American Record Guide*, *Classic FM*, *Gramophone* and *International Record Review*. The other labels for which he has recorded include Afka, Artek, Cambria and TNC.

John McLaughlin Williams has appeared with such orchestras as the Chicago Sinfonietta, Colorado Symphony Orchestra and Detroit Symphony Orchestra in the USA, Novaya Rossiya in Russia, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, Classic FM Orchestra in Bulgaria and many others. Active in popular genres as well, he has conducted for Platypus Theatre, the Celtic band Colcannon and R&B superstars Al Jarreau, Brian McKnight and The Winans for 'Christmas Glory', a gospel Christmas concert for the Fox and UPN television networks. He



Photograph: Vera Davis

has also performed music for video games, conducting the multimedia concert presentation of Disney's *Kingdom Hearts*.

He is also a solo violinist, pianist and chamber musician. At age fourteen he appeared as soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra and has since performed as soloist with the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, the Portland Symphony Orchestra, South Carolina Philharmonic and other such ensembles. He has also been a member of the Houston Symphony Orchestra and the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, where he served as concertmaster.

The **Ukrainian Festival Orchestra** (UFO) grew out of the chamber orchestra Collegium Musicum, founded in 2014 in Lviv, western Ukraine, by the conductor Ivan Ostapovych and culture manager Taras Demko. The repertoire of the UFO includes music from the Baroque to the present, but its fundamental aim is to record Ukrainian classical music and popularise it all around the world – a celebration of Ukrainian music that Ivan Ostapovych describes as 'a festival that lasts forever'. Among the major musicians with whom the UFO has worked are the violinists Noah Bendix-Balgley, Corey Cerovsek, Sergey Ostrovsky and Josef Spaček, the pianists Antonii Baryshevskyi, Andrei Gavrilov and Vadym Kholodenko, the cellist Jacob Shaw and the violinist-conductors Sigiswald Kuijken and Lev Markiz. .

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Assistant: Grygoriy Mokrytskyi

Sonata

Recording engineer: Laurent Compagnie

Mastering: Adaq Khan

All music, and further information, available directly from the composer
at corentinboissier.net.

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CORENTIN BOISSIER Two Piano Concertos and a Sonata

<i>Glamour Concerto</i> (2012; orch. 2016)	25:00
1 I Glamour appassionato (<i>Allegro</i>)	9:50
2 II Manhattan Waltz-Romance (<i>Moderato, tempo di valse</i>)	7:28
3 III Spanish Lovers in Brooklyn (<i>Andante – Allegro all'espagnola</i>)	7:42

Piano Sonata No. 2, <i>Appassionata</i> (2015)	24:33
4 I <i>Allegro impetuoso (quasi una fantasia)</i>	11:32
5 II Intermezzo: <i>Andante espressivo</i>	5:22
6 III Finale: <i>Allegro appassionato</i>	7:39

<i>Philip Marlowe Concerto</i> (2013; rev. 2018)	19:57
7 I <i>Allegro drammatico –</i>	7:52
8 II <i>Lento</i> (Passacaglia) –	7:31
9 III <i>Allegro feroce, tempo di toccata</i>	4:34

Valentina Seferinova, piano

TT 69:31

Ukrainian Festival Orchestra 1–3 7–9

FIRST RECORDINGS

John McLaughlin Williams, conductor 1–3 7–9