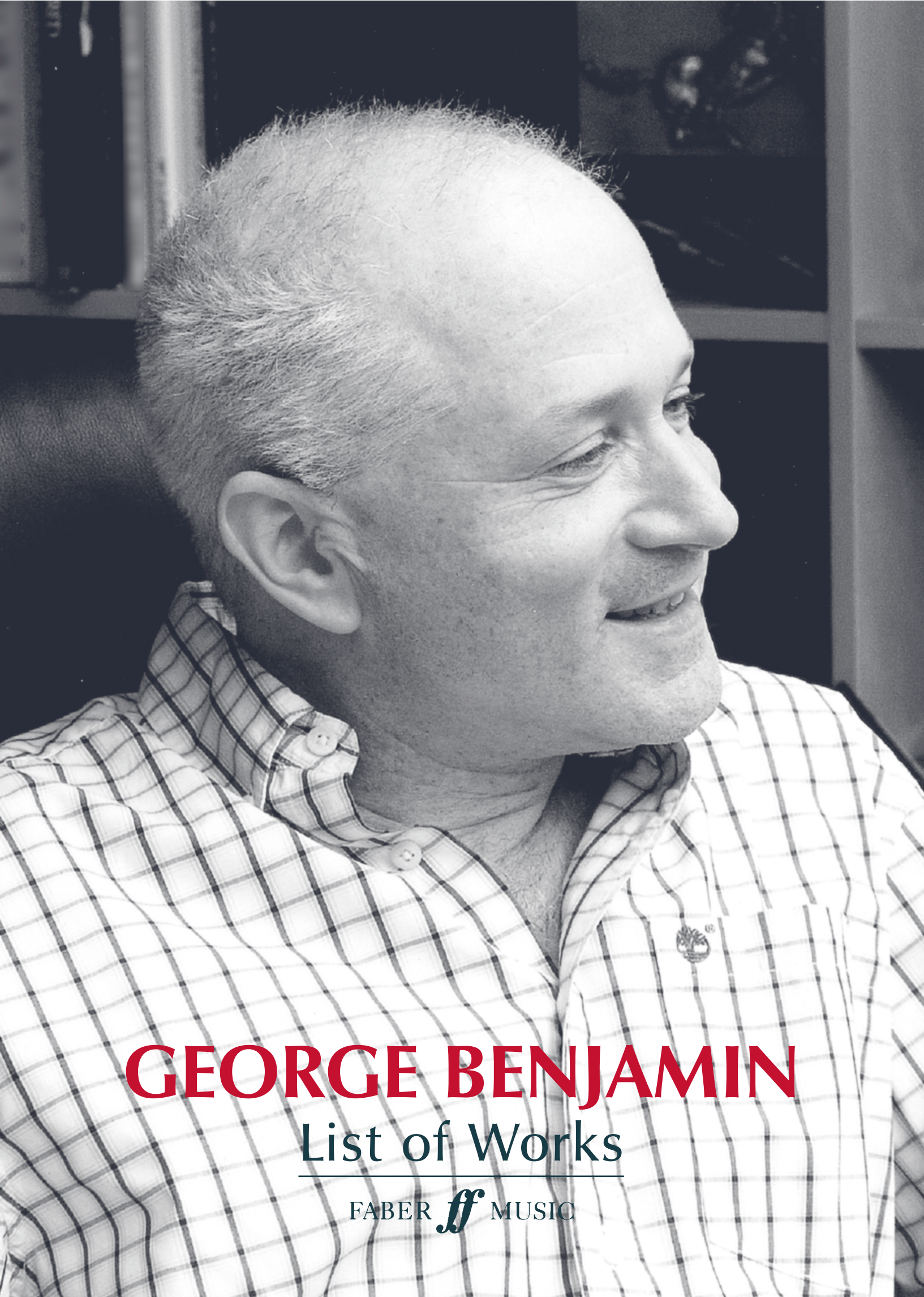


A black and white photograph of George Benjamin, an older man with thinning hair, smiling and looking to the right. He is wearing a light-colored shirt with a dark grid pattern. The background is dark and out of focus.

GEORGE BENJAMIN

List of Works

FABER *ff* MUSIC

BIOGRAPHY

George Benjamin is one of the outstanding composers of his generation. Born in 1960, Benjamin started to play the piano at the age of seven, and began composing almost immediately. In 1976 he entered the Paris Conservatoire to study with Olivier Messiaen (composition) and Yvonne Loriod (piano), after which he studied under Alexander Goehr at King's College Cambridge. His first orchestral work, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, was played at the BBC Proms when he was just 20; since then it has achieved a remarkable international performance record, as have his two subsequent works, *A Mind of Winter* and *At First Light*. *Antara* was a commission from IRCAM to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Pompidou centre in 1987, and Benjamin was offered 'Carte blanche' at l'Opéra Bastille in 1992. The premiere of *Sudden Time* was given at the first Meltdown Festival in 1993, followed by *Three Inventions for Chamber Orchestra* at the 75th Salzburg Festival in 1995.

The LSO and Pierre Boulez gave the world premiere of *Palimpsests* in 2002 to mark the opening of the LSO's season-long retrospective of his work at the Barbican, 'By George', a project which also included the premiere of *Shadowlines* played by Pierre-Laurent Aimard. In recent years there have been numerous other major retrospectives of his work, including Brussels (Ars Musica, 2003), Tokyo (Tokyo Opera City, 2003), Berlin (DSO, 2004–05), Strasbourg (Musica Festival, 2005) and Madrid (Spanish National Orchestra, 2005). The centrepiece of a large-scale portrait at the 2006 Festival d'Automne in Paris was his first operatic work, *Into the Little Hill*, a collaboration with the English playwright Martin Crimp which has been greeted with international acclaim. He has accepted the fourth Roche commission, which resulted in *Duet* for piano and orchestra, which was premiered during his tenure as composer in residence at the 2008 Lucerne Festival.

He has built up a close relationship with the Tanglewood Festival in America since his first appearance there in 1999. As a conductor he works with some of the world's leading ensembles and orchestras, amongst them the London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern, the BBCSO, the Cleveland, San Francisco and Concertgebouw orchestras and the Berlin Philharmonic.

In 1999 he made his operatic debut conducting *Pelléas et Mélisande* at La Monnaie, Brussels and he has conducted numerous world premieres, including important works by Wolfgang Rihm, Unsuk Chin, Grisey and Ligeti.

George Benjamin lives in London, and is the Henry Purcell Professor of Composition at King's College, London. He was artistic consultant to the BBC's three year retrospective of the 20th Century music, *Sounding the Century*, and was invited to become an associate artist at London's South Bank in 2006. He was made a Chevalier dans l'ordre des Arts et Lettres in 1996 and was elected to the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts, only the fourth time such an honour has been bestowed on a British composer. In 2001 he was awarded the Deutsche Symphonie Orchester's first ever Schoenberg Prize for composition.

His works are recorded on Nimbus Records www.wyastone.co.uk

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ABBREVIATIONS

WOODWIND

picc piccolo; **fl** flute; **afl** alto flute; **bfl** bass flute; **ob** oboe; **ca** cor anglais; **cl** clarinet; **bcl** bass clarinet; **cbcl** contrabass clarinet; **bsn** bassoon; **cbsn** contra-bassoon

BRASS

hn horn; **fl.hn** flugelhorn; **ptpt** piccolo trumpet (B♭); **tpt** trumpet; **btpt** bass trumpet; **trbn** trombone; **btrbn** bass trombone

PERCUSSION

ant.cym antique cymbals; **BD** bass drum; **c.bell** cow bell; **cast** castanets; **chin.cym** chinese cymbal; **crot** crotales; **cym**s pair of cymbals; **glsp** glockenspiel; **mcas** maracas; **mar** marimba; **SD** side drum; **siz.cym** sizzle cymbal; **susp.cym** suspended cymbal; **t.bells** tubular bells; **tam-t** tam-tam; **tamb** tambourine; **TD** tenor drum; **tgl** triangle; **tpl.bl** temple block; **vib** vibraphone; **wdbl** wood block; **xyl** xylophone;

STRINGS

vln violin; **vla** viola; **vlc** cello; **db** double bass

KEYBOARDS

pno piano; **cel** celesta; **synth** synthesiser

OTHERS

hp harp

All other instrument names are given in full

INTRODUCTION TO THE MUSIC

George Benjamin may not celebrate his 50th birthday until next year, but his composing career already comfortably stretches back more than 30 years. Though it's temptingly convenient to date the start of that career from Benjamin's first orchestral score, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, which received its premiere at Cambridge University in 1980, while he was studying there, his work list already included a clutch of significant pieces written in his late teens, during and after his studies with Olivier Messiaen in Paris, including a substantial sonata for his own instrument, the piano. Those works show how surefooted Benjamin's early development was, so that those of us lucky enough to be at the premiere of *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* are never likely to forget the precocious mastery of large-scale form and harmonic movement, combined with an already faultless ear for orchestral colour, that its undergraduate composer was demonstrating. With this single 20-minute work, however, Benjamin announced himself as a new voice in British music and when the piece was played in the BBC Proms the following summer, he began to establish an international reputation too.

At Cambridge the rigour of Benjamin's early modernist training under Messiaen had been complemented and reinforced by composition studies with Alexander Goehr, and in the years following *Flat Horizon* his exceptional talent was confirmed by two more dazzlingly effective scores, the Wallace Stevens setting of *A Mind of Winter* and the J M W Turner-inspired *At First Light*, for chamber orchestra. Yet through the rest of the 1980s major new works appeared relatively slowly. Only two pieces, *Antara* for two flutes, sampling keyboards and ensemble, which was composed as a result of an invitation Benjamin received from Pierre Boulez to work with the cutting-edge computerised technology of IRCAM in Paris and, in utter contrast, the W B Yeats setting of *Upon Silence*, for mezzo soprano and the delightfully archaic ensemble of a consort of viols, significantly expanded Benjamin's musical range. The meticulous formal planning and exquisitely imagined sound worlds that characterised each work were, it seemed, the return on an immense investment in compositional preparation and effort. 'I am obsessed with harmony and the perception of harmony,' Benjamin said last year, 'I don't write music in which I can't hear the harmonies, and can't tell whether the notes are in the right place or not'.

Through the late 80s Benjamin's burgeoning career as a conductor was providing the perfect complement to his meticulously detailed creative activity, and these twin activities have fertilised each other ever since. The textures of the orchestral *Sudden Time*, which received its premiere in 1993 after a protracted four years' gestation, revealed how Benjamin's knowledge

of the orchestra from the podium was already informing his composition, which in its articulation and exploration of different kinds of musical time, remains one of his most ambitious and far-reaching works. If there was a sense of breakthrough about it, as if a new phase in his music had been initiated, it proved to be the first of just four major works that Benjamin produced in 1990s, even though each of them was utterly different from the others.

After *Sudden Time*, the *Three Inventions for Chamber Orchestra*, completed in 1995, pushed Benjamin's musical language into new territory, both dramatically and expressively, and in retrospect might have been the start of the steady (I almost wrote 'stately') progress towards Benjamin's first music theatre work, *Into the Little Hill*, which would eventually appear in 2006. Perhaps too *Sometime Voices*, a setting for baritone and orchestra of one of Caliban's speeches from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which was commissioned for the opening of Manchester's Bridgewater Hall in 1996, was also a pointer to that future theatrical work. Yet as a demonstration of how Benjamin's aural imagination remained peerless among composers of his generation, the far more modestly scaled *Viola, Viola* is a paradigm. In an unambiguously assertive tour de force for two violas lasting barely ten minutes, which makes use of surprisingly few of the extended playing techniques that have characterised much string writing in the last quarter century, Benjamin conjures an almost orchestral range of sonority, almost symbiotically entwining the two instruments and banishing their familiar image as purveyors of melodic melancholy.

That same measured rate of production has generally continued through the first decade of the 21st century, though the actual composition of the pieces that have emerged has sometimes been remarkably rapid. The wonderfully complex orchestral textures of the two *Palimpsest* pieces took three years to reach their final form, but both *Dance Figures* and *Into the Little Hill*, which, Benjamin has said, could not have been written without his experience of composing the mosaic of small, closed forms of that preceding orchestral work, were completed speedily, without ever compromising the principles of formal clarity and harmonic logic he has maintained throughout his career. The exact compositional procedures may change from work to work – *Shadowlines*, the set of piano pieces that Benjamin composed in 2001 for his friend and fellow Messiaen pupil Pierre-Laurent Aimard fixate on canons, for instance – but the over-arching principles informing them have never shifted.

When it received its premiere in 2006, *Into the Little Hill* was everything those who for almost 20 years had followed the rumours of Benjamin's contemplating a theatre piece could have wished for. With a libretto by playwright Martin Crimp which pithily retells the tale of the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, Benjamin created a form of music theatre entirely on his own intensely economical terms, using just a pair of female singers, soprano and mezzo, to act as narrators and to portray all the protagonists of his 'lyric tale', and setting them against an ensemble dominated by the timbres of bass flute, a pair of basset horns, banjo and cimbalom. By any standards *Into the Little Hill* is a remarkable achievement, and Benjamin's most recent work, *Duet*, a concertante piece for piano which also seems to reassess the relationship between the solo instrument and the orchestra in ways that seem both entirely personal and freshly minted, seems to combine a total awareness of tradition with a determination to shape its legacy entirely to Benjamin's own musical ends. Like everything he has composed over the last 30 years, it is both startlingly lucid and wondrously coherent.

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Fl. *fff* *sub.* *pp*

A. Fl. *fff* *sub.*

C. A. *fff* *fff* *p*

Cl. *f* *sub.* *pp*

B. Cl.

Bsn. *fff* *fff* *p*

Hn. *p* *fpp* *p* *fpp*

Tpt. (Straight mute) *mfpp* *mf pp* *f* *pp* *mf pp*

Euph.

Harp *fff* *posse.* (E_b F₄ G₄ A₄ D₅ C₅ B₄) (F₄ G₄ A₄)

Pno. *

Vln. *fff* *fff*

Vla.

Vc. *pizz.* *pp*

Excerpt: *Three Inventions for Chamber Orchestra*, p. 29

EINE EINFÜHRUNG IN DIE MUSIK

Obwohl George Benjamin nächstes Jahr erst seinen 50. Geburtstag feiert, kann er bereits auf eine über dreißigjährige Karriere als Komponist zurückblicken. Sein erstes Orchesterwerk, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, wurde 1980 an der Universität Cambridge uraufgeführt, wo er zu diesem Zeitpunkt noch studierte. Dies stellte jedoch, wie man vielleicht meinen könnte, keineswegs der Beginn seiner Laufbahn dar. Im Werkkatalog von Benjamin finden sich mehrere bedeutende Stücke noch früheren Datums, die während seiner Lehrzeit bei Olivier Messiaen in Paris oder kurz danach entstanden, darunter eine große Sonate für sein eigenes Instrument, das Klavier. Diese Werke des damals noch nicht einmal Zwanzigjährigen zeigen, mit welcher Sicherheit Benjamin schon in den Anfängen seiner künstlerischen Entwicklung komponierte. Wer wie ich das Glück hatte, die Erstaufführung von *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* mitzuerleben, wird nie die frühreife, virtuose Beherrschung der großen Form und der harmonischen Bewegung des jungen Kompositionsschülers vergessen, verbunden mit seinem untrüglichen Ohr für Orchesterfarben. Dieses nur zwanzig Minuten lange Werk war es, mit dem Benjamin als neue Stimme in der britischen Musikszene Aufmerksamkeit erregte und das ihn, nachdem es noch im Sommer desselben Jahres bei den renommierten BBC Proms aufgeführt worden war, auch international bekannt machte.

In Cambridge konsolidierte und erweiterte Benjamin seine frühe, streng modernistische Ausbildung unter Messiaen durch Kompositionsunterricht bei Alexander Goehr. In den Jahren nach *Flat Horizon* bestätigten zwei weitere, höchst wirkungsvolle Kompositionen sein außergewöhnliches Talent: *A Mind of Winter*, die Vertonung eines Gedichts von Wallace Stevenson, und *At First Light* für Kammerorchester, inspiriert von einem Gemälde des berühmten englischen Malers William Turner. In den restlichen 1980er Jahren ließen größere, neue Werke ziemlich lange auf sich warten. Nur zwei Kompositionen Benjamins in dieser Zeit eröffneten neue Dimensionen in seinem schöpferischen Universum, *Antara* für zwei Flöten, Sampling-Keyboards und Ensemble, das infolge einer Einladung von Pierre Boulez ans IRCAM in Paris entstand, wo Benjamin Gelegenheit hatte, mit elektronischen Instrumenten und hochmoderner Computertechnik zu arbeiten, und dann im völligen Gegensatz dazu *Upon Silence* (nach einem Gedicht des irischen Lyrikers W. B. Yeats) für Mezzosopran und ein herrlich archaisches Gambenconsort. Die minutiös geplante Form und die exquisit gestalteten Klangwelten, die diese beiden Werke auszeichnen, waren allem Anschein nach das Ergebnis eines enormen Einsatzes an kompositorischer Vorbereitung und konzentrierter Arbeit. „Ich bin besessen von der Harmonie und ihrer Wahrnehmung. Ich schreibe keine Musik, in der ich die Harmonien nicht höre und bei der ich nicht sagen kann, ob die Töne am richtigen Ort sind oder nicht“, erklärte Benjamin im vergangenen Jahr.

In den späten 80er Jahren wurde Benjamins zunehmendes Engagement als Dirigent zur perfekten Ergänzung für seine äußerst detaillierte, kreative Arbeit als Komponist; die beiden Aktivitäten befruchteten sich auch heute noch gegenseitig. Der Einfluss seiner Orchestererfahrung aus der Sicht des Dirigenten machte sich schon in den Strukturen des Orchesterwerks *Sudden Time* bemerkbar, das 1993 nach einer Entstehungszeit von vier Jahren uraufgeführt wurde. Mit seiner Artikulierung und Exploration verschiedener musikalischer Zeiten gilt *Sudden Time* bis heute als eines von Benjamins ehrgeizigsten und weitreichendsten Werken. *Sudden Time* wurde als ein Durchbruch empfunden, als ein Neubeginn in Benjamins Musikschaffen, war dann jedoch nur das erste von gerade einmal vier größeren, in ihrer Art grundverschiedenen Kompositionen,

die er in den 90er Jahren vollendete.

Nach *Sudden Time*, stieß Benjamin mit seiner musikalischen Sprache in *Three Inventions for Chamber Orchestra* 1995 dramatisch und ausdrucksstechnisch in neue Gefilde vor. Rückblickend betrachtet war dies wohl der Beginn seines steten (fast möchte ich sagen, „gemäßigten“) Fortschreitens hin zu seinem ersten Werk für das Musiktheater, *Into the Little Hill*, das 2006 uraufgeführt wurde. Auch *Sometime Voices*, basierend auf Calibans Monolog aus Shakespeares *Der Sturm*, eine Auftragskomposition für Bariton und Orchester zur Eröffnung der Bridgewater Hall in Manchester im Jahr 1996, war vielleicht ein Wegweiser in Richtung eines zukünftigen bühnenmusikalischen Schaffens. Das Paradebeispiel für die unter den Komponisten seiner Generation unerreichte klangliche Phantasie von Benjamin ist allerdings das weit bescheidener dimensionierte Stück *Viola, Viola*. In dieser nur knapp zehn Minuten langen, unverhohlen selbstbewussten Tour de Force für zwei Bratschen, bei der erstaunlich wenig Gebrauch von den avancierten Spieltechniken gemacht wird, wie sie für viele Streicherkompositionen des letzten Vierteljahrhunderts typisch sind, beschwört Benjamin eine fast orchestrale Klangfülle. Ganz entgegen ihrem traditionellen Image als Träger melodischer Melancholie gehen die beiden Instrumente hier eine fast symbiotische Verbindung ein.

Das moderate Tempo, was das Erscheinen neuer Werke von Benjamin betrifft, hat sich im Wesentlichen auch in der ersten Dekade des 21. Jahrhunderts fortgesetzt, obwohl die einzelnen Kompositionen selbst oft in erstaunlich kurzer Zeit entstanden. Die wunderbar komplexen Strukturen der beiden *Palimpsest* Orchesterstücke brauchten drei Jahre bis zu ihrer Vollendung. Dagegen schuf Benjamin *Dance Figures* und *Into the Little Hill* – von denen er sagt, dass er sie ohne die Erfahrung mit dem Mosaik kleiner, geschlossener Formen beim Komponieren der vorausgehenden Orchesterstücke nie hätte schreiben können – innerhalb kurzer Zeit, aber ohne jeglichen Kompromiss in Bezug auf zwei wichtige, sein ganzes Schaffen bestimmende Grundsätze: Klarheit der Form und Logik der Harmonie. Die kompositorische Gattung mag von Werk zu Werk variieren – so handelt es sich beispielsweise bei *Shadowlines*, das Benjamin 2001 für Pierre-Laurent Aimard, seinen Freund und Mitschüler bei Messiaen, komponierte, um einen Klavierzyklus aus kanonischen Präludien – alle Werke orientieren sich jedoch letztlich an den denselben leitenden Prinzipien. Nachdem fast zwanzig Jahre lang Gerüchte umgingen, dass Benjamin ein Werk für das Musiktheater schreiben wollte, war es 2006 endlich soweit: Die Uraufführung von *Into the Little Hill* erfüllte alle lang gehegten Erwartungen. Nach einem Libretto des Dramatikers Martin Crimp, einer knapp formulierten Neuerzählung der Geschichte vom Rattenfänger von Hameln, schuf Benjamin seine ganz eigene Form der Kammeroper, karg besetzt mit nur zwei Stimmen – Sopran und Alt – die das Geschehen kommentieren und gleichzeitig alle Figuren dieser „lyrischen Erzählung“ darstellen, sowie einem kleinen Ensemble, das von den Klangfarben einer Bassflöte, zweier Bassethörner, einem Banjo und einem Zymbal geprägt wird. *Into the Little Hill* ist in jeder Hinsicht eine großartige Leistung. Benjamins jüngstes Werk *Duet* für Klavier und Orchester, das die Beziehung zwischen Soloinstrument und Orchester auf ganz eigenwillige und erfrischend neue Weise beleuchtet, ist ein weiteres Beispiel dafür, dass sich bei diesem Komponisten ein umfassendes Traditionsbewusstsein mit der Entschlossenheit paart, das musikalische Erbe ganz nach seinen persönlichen Vorstellungen zu formen. Wie alles andere, was Benjamin in den letzten dreißig Jahren komponiert hat, ist auch dieses Werk verblüffend klar und wunderbar kohärent.

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INTRODUCTION À LA MUSIQUE

George Benjamin ne fête pas son 50e anniversaire avant l'année prochaine et pourtant sa carrière de compositeur s'étend déjà sur plus de trois décennies. Bien qu'il soit tentant (et commode) de fixer le début de cette carrière à sa première composition orchestrale, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, dont la première eut lieu à l'Université de Cambridge en 1980 tandis qu'il y était encore étudiant, il avait alors déjà à son actif quelques oeuvres substantielles composées dans sa prime jeunesse (pendant ses études avec Olivier Messiaen à Paris et par la suite), dont une sonate majeure pour son instrument de prédilection, le piano. Ces oeuvres démontrent la maturité déjà évidente dans les premières compositions de Benjamin et ceux d'entre nous qui eurent la chance d'assister à la première de *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* n'oublieront jamais la maîtrise précoce de la grande forme orchestrale et du mouvement harmonique, associée à une oreille déjà parfaite pour la couleur orchestrale, démontrée par son jeune compositeur. Avec cette seule oeuvre de 20 minutes, Benjamin s'annonçait déjà comme la nouvelle voix de la musique britannique. Sa mise au programme des BBC Proms l'été suivant contribua à asseoir sa réputation internationale.

À Cambridge, la rigueur des premières études modernistes de Benjamin sous la direction de Messiaen furent complétées et renforcées par des études de composition sous l'égide d'Alexander Goehr. Dans les années suivant *Flat Horizon*, son exceptionnel talent fut confirmé par deux nouvelles compositions fulgurantes, *A Mind of Winter*, avec un livret de Wallace Stevens, et *At First Light*, composition pour orchestre de chambre inspirée de J M W Turner. Néanmoins, les années 1980 furent marquées par un nombre relativement restreint de nouvelles oeuvres majeures. Seules deux compositions, *Antara*, pour deux flûtes, synthétiseurs et ensemble (composée suite à l'invitation de Pierre Boulez à travailler avec la technologie informatique de pointe de l'IRCAM à Paris) et, dans un contraste saisissant, *Upon Silence*, oeuvre pour mezzo soprano et un ensemble délicieusement archaïque composé de violes, inspirée de W B Yeats, enrichirent significativement la palette musicale de Benjamin. La planification formelle méticuleuse et les atmosphères sonores exquises qui caractérisaient chaque opus semblaient être le fruit d'un travail considérable de préparation et d'un grand effort de composition. « Je suis obsédé par l'harmonie et la perception de l'harmonie », déclarait Benjamin l'année dernière. « Je ne compose pas de musique dont je ne peux pas entendre les harmonies ni dans laquelle il est impossible de savoir si les notes sont au bon endroit ou non. »

Vers la fin des années 80, les débuts de Benjamin en tant que chef d'orchestre complétèrent parfaitement sa création méticuleusement détaillée, ces deux activités se nourrissant mutuellement depuis lors. Les textures de l'oeuvre orchestrale *Sudden Time*, dont la première eut lieu en 1993 après une gestation laborieuse de quatre ans, révélaient d'ores et déjà l'influence qu'exerçait sur sa composition sa connaissance de l'orchestre depuis le pupitre. Dans son articulation et son exploration de différents types de durées musicales, cette oeuvre demeure l'une de ses plus ambitieuses et grandioses. Si elle dégagait un parfum d'innovation et donnait l'impression de marquer un tournant dans sa musique, elle se révéla être la première de quatre oeuvres majeures produites par Benjamin dans les années 1990, bien que chacune d'elles soit radicalement différente des autres.

Après *Sudden Time*, *Three Inventions for Chamber Orchestra*, terminée en 1995, marqua l'exploration par Benjamin d'un nouvel univers musical, tant dramatiquement qu'expressivement. A posteriori, elle indiqua peut-être le début de l'évolution qui mena à sa première oeuvre scénique, *Into the Little Hill*, en 2006. Peut-être *Sometime Voices*, composition pour baryton et

orchestre reposant sur l'une des tirades de Caliban dans *La tempête* de Shakespeare et commanditée pour l'inauguration du Bridgewater Hall de Manchester en 1996, fut-elle également un jalon de cette future évolution théâtrale. Toutefois, en tant que démonstration de l'imagination sonore exceptionnelle de Benjamin, sans égale parmi les compositeurs de sa génération, *Viola, Viola*, malgré sa relative modestie, se pose en véritable paradigme. Dans ce tour de force foudroyant de dix minutes seulement, écrit pour deux altos en utilisant un nombre étonnamment restreint des techniques de jeu étendues qui caractérisent la plupart des compositions pour cordes du dernier quart de siècle, Benjamin crée une gamme de sonorités pratiquement orchestrale, mariant les deux instruments en une quasi-symbiose et pulvérisant leur image traditionnelle de chantes de la mélancolie mélodique.

Ce rythme de production mesuré se poursuivit pendant la première décennie du XXIe siècle, bien que la composition des oeuvres proprement dite ait parfois été remarquablement rapide. Ainsi, bien que les textures orchestrales merveilleusement complexes des deux *Palimpsests* aient mis trois ans à prendre forme, *Dance Figures* et *Into the Little Hill*, qui, selon Benjamin lui-même, n'auraient jamais pu être écrites s'il n'avait pas précédemment composé la mosaïque de petites formes closes de cette pièce orchestrale antérieure, furent promptement terminées, sans jamais nuire aux principes de clarté formelle et de logique harmonique qu'il appliqua durant toute sa carrière. Les procédures de composition exactes peuvent changer d'une oeuvre à l'autre (comme en atteste *Shadowlines*, l'ensemble de pièces pour piano composées par Benjamin en 2001 pour son ami – et autre ancien élève de Messiaen – Pierre Laurent Aimard et son amour des canons), les principes fondamentaux sur lesquelles ils reposent sont restés immuables.

Lors de sa première en 2006, *Into the Little Hill* combla toutes les espérances de ceux qui suivaient depuis près de 20 ans les rumeurs de composition d'une pièce théâtrale par Benjamin. Accompagné d'un libretto du dramaturge Martin Crimp, qui redonne un sang neuf au conte du joueur de flûte de Hamelin, Benjamin créa une toute nouvelle forme de théâtre musical basé sur une grande économie. En effet, seules deux solistes, une soprano et une contralto, font office de narratrices et incarnent tous les protagonistes de ce 'conte lyrique', accompagnées d'un ensemble dominé par le timbre d'une flûte basse, d'une paire de cors de basset, d'un banjo et d'un cymbalum. La réussite d'*Into the Little Hill* est incontestable et la dernière oeuvre en date de Benjamin, *Duet*, une pièce de musique concertante pour piano qui semble également bouleverser la relation entre l'instrument solo et l'orchestre d'une manière entièrement personnelle et novatrice à la fois, paraît marier une connaissance parfaite de la tradition à une volonté de la transformer selon les propres termes du compositeur. A l'instar de toutes ses oeuvres des trente dernières années, elle est à la fois extraordinairement lucide et magnifiquement cohérente.

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OPERA

INTO THE LITTLE HILL (2006)

a lyric tale in two parts for soprano, contralto and ensemble of 15 players

Duration 40 minutes

fl(=picc + bfl).2 basset hn in F.cbl - 2 crts.tenor trbn - cimbalom=perc(1): cym/guio/2 crot/whip - 2 vln (II=mandolin).2 vla(II=banjo).2 vlc.db

Text: Martin Crimp (Eng)

Commissioned by the Festival d'Automne à Paris, with contributions from the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation; Opéra National de Paris; and Ensemble Modern, with contributions from the Forberg-Schneider Foundation

FP: 22.11.06, Festival d'Automne, Paris: Anu Komi/Hilary Summers/Ensemble Modern/Franck Ollu

Score 0-571-53212-8 on sale, and parts for hire

The image shows a musical score excerpt from 'Into the Little Hill'. It features two vocal parts: the Minister and the Narrator. The Minister's part is marked 'pp sotto voce' and includes the lyrics 'What do you want?'. The Narrator's part is marked 'poco' and 'ppp' and includes the lyrics 'says the mi-nis-ter.'. The score is written on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. There are also some instrumental markings like 'II', 'pizz.', and 'pp'.

ORCHESTRAL

RINGED BY THE FLAT HORIZON (1979-80)

orchestra

Duration 20 minutes

3(II+III=picc).2.ca.3(II=Ebcl.III=bcl).2.cbsn - 4.ptpt.2.3.1 - perc(5): 4 timp/SD/siz.cym/BD/5 tpl.bl/5 bongos/glass chimes/whip/5 susp.cym/glsp/tam-t/tgl/vib/xyl/t.bells/cym - cel - pno - harp - strings (pref 16.16.12.10.8)

Written for the Cambridge University Musical Society

FP: 5.3.80, Cambridge: CUMS 1st Orchestra/Mark Elder; London Premiere: 25.8.80, BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London: BBC Symphony Orchestra/Mark Elder

Study score 0-571-51078-7 on sale, full score and parts for hire

A MIND OF WINTER (1981)

soprano and orchestra

Duration 10 minutes

2 picc(=fl).ob.ca(=ob).2.2 - 2.ptpt.1.0.0 - perc(1):3 susp.cym/2 tgl/SD - strings (6.6.4.4.2)

Text: The Snowman by Wallace Stevens (Eng)

Written for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the 1981 Aldeburgh Festival

FP: 26.6.81, Aldeburgh Festival, Snape Maltings: Teresa Cahill/Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Jerzy Maksymiuk

Score 0-571-51162-7 on sale, and parts for hire

JUBILATION (1985)

orchestra and mixed children's group

Duration 10 minutes

picc.2(II=picc).2.ca.2.bcl.2.cbsn - 4.ptpt.2.3.0 - perc(4): BD/crot/t.bells/4 susp.cym/mar/gong/glsp/TD/vib/tam-t/timp - pno - synth(yamaha DX7(II)D or F-D)- harp - strings (vln=3 equal parts: min 8.8.8) Extra groups: 20 recorders: 10 sopraninos (3=gartlein).10 descant(3=gartlein): 7 steel drum: brass: 4 hn.4 trbn.3 tpt.ptpt - choir (approx 60 - 100 children's voices) - perc:(min 10) 6 pairs of claves/4 pairs large cym

Commissioned by the Inner London Education Authority with funds provided by them and the Arts Council of Great Britain

FP: 16.9.85, Royal Festival Hall, London: London Schools Symphony Orchestra/George Benjamin

Score 0-571-51005-1 on sale, and parts for hire

SUDDEN TIME (1989-93)

large orchestra

Duration 15 minutes

4(=picc+afl).2(=gartlein recorder).ca.2.bcl.2.cbsn - 4441 - timp - perc(5): 4 sets sleigh bells/9 tpl.bl/2 whip/2 vib(+db bow)/2 susp.cym/5 tamb/10 mini-tabla/2 glsp/4 guio/5 bongos/16 crot/3 tom-t/2 BD/2 rototom - pno - 2 harp - strings (14.12.10.8.6)

FP: 21.7.93, Meltdown, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London: London Philharmonic Orchestra/George Benjamin

Score 0-571-51521-5 on sale, and parts for hire

SOMETIME VOICES (1996)

baritone solo, SATB chorus and orchestra

Duration 10 minutes

3(=picc+III=afl).3.3(III=bcl).2.cbsn - 4.3(I=ptpt).3.1 - timp - perc(4): 3 xyl/timp/tam-t/2 BD/3 glsp - cel - 2 harp - mandolin - banjo - strings

Text: William Shakespeare (Eng)

Commissioned by for the opening concerts of the Bridgewater Hall, by the Hallé Orchestra with funds from the Arts Council of England and Royal Mail

FP: 11.9.96, Bridgewater Concert Hall, Manchester: William Dazeley/Hallé Orchestra and Choir/Kent Nagano

Full score 0-571-51980-6, vocal score (fp) 0-571-52050-2 on sale, and parts for hire

PALIMPSESTS (2000-02)

orchestra

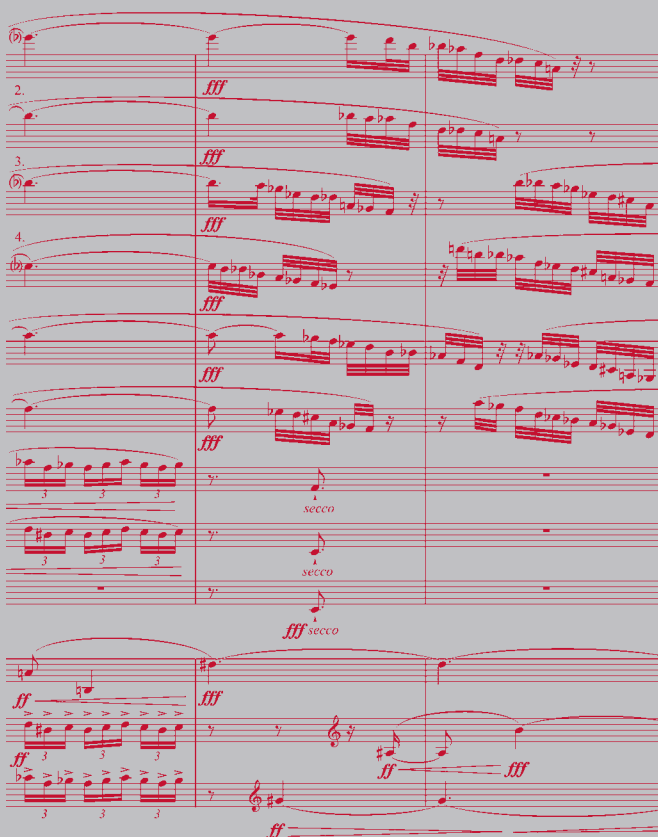
Duration 21 minutes

4(I-IV=picc, IV=afl).0.4(IV=cl in A, III+IV=bcl).0.cbsn - 3.4
(I=ptpt).btpt.trbn.btrbn.1 - perc(3): 2 xyl/5 SD/
2 whip/2 vib/2 vibraslap/2 BD/tgl/3 tpl.bl/2 congas/5 bongos/
4 c.bells - pno(=cel) - 2 harp - strings (5 vln.3 vla.8 db)

Palimpsest I was commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra, Konzerthaus Wien, Kölner Philharmonie, Carnegie Hall, Société Philharmonique de Bruxelles and Bruxelles 2000, Salzburger Festspiele, Musikfestwochen Luzern and Edinburgh International Festival for Boulez 2000

FP: *Palimpsest I*, 2.2.00, Barbican Hall, London: London Symphony Orchestra/Pierre Boulez. First complete performance of *Palimpsests*: 5.10.02, Barbican Hall, London: London Symphony Orchestra/Pierre Boulez

Score 0-571-52202-X on sale, and parts for hire



Excerpt: *Palimpsests*, p. 88

DANCE FIGURES (2004)

orchestra

Duration 16 minutes

2 fl(II=picc 2).picc(=fl 3).2.Ebcl.2 cl(I=E♭, II=B♭, A & bcl).2.cbsn - 4231 - timp - perc(4): 15 tpl.bl(large-very small)/
2 guiro (large & small)/tam-t/2 ratchet/BD/2 SD (medium & very small)/glsp/cyms(small)/2 anvils/fishing-rod reel/cencerros (middle C)/cencerros (low A)/vib/whip/vibraslap/tamb/2 log drums/alarm bell - harp - cel - strings (min 12.12.10.8.6)

Commissioned for the Chicago SO, Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie and Strasbourg Festival Musica with choreography by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker

FP: 19.5.05, Chicago, IL, USA: Chicago Symphony Orchestra/ Daniel Barenboim

Score 0-571-52532-6 on sale, and parts for hire

DUET FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA (2008)

Duration 12 minutes

2(II=picc).2.3.bcl.2(II=cbsn) - 2230 - timp - perc(3):
xyl/t.bells/mar/claves/BD/3 tpl.bl/cym - harp - cel - strings
(0.0.8.8.6)

Commissioned by Roche for the Lucerne Festival

FP: 30.8.08, Lucerne Festival, Switzerland: Pierre-Laurent Aimard/The Cleveland Orchestra/Franz Welser-Möst

Score and parts for hire

(sempre l.v.)



Excerpt: *Duet*, p. 24

ENSEMBLE/CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

OCTET (1978)

chamber ensemble of 8 players

Duration 10 minutes

fl(=picc).cl - perc(1): xylrim/glsp/crot/2 susp.cym/tgl/2 tpl.bl - cel
- vln.vla.vlc.db

Written at the request of Francis Routh for the Redcliffe Concerts of British Music

FP: 24.2.79, Purcell Room, London: Redcliffe Ensemble/Edwin Roxburgh

Score 0-571-50808-1 on sale, and parts for hire

AT FIRST LIGHT (1982)

chamber orchestra of 14 players

Duration 20 minutes

1(=afl+picc).1.1(=bcl).1(=cbsn) - 1.1(=ptpt)1.0 - perc(1):
4 susp.cym/2 tgl/2 crot/gong/vib/guio/mcas/whip/tpl.bl/ping-
pong ball/flat-bottomed drinking glass/large newspaper/tam-t/SD
- pno(=cel) - 2 vln.vla.vlc.db

Commissioned by the London Sinfonietta for their concert series 1982, with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain

FP: 23.11.82, St John's Smith Square, London: London Sinfonietta/Simon Rattle

Score 0-571-50718-2 on sale, and parts for hire

FANFARE FOR AQUARIUS (1983)

chamber orchestra of 15 players

Duration 1 minute

picc.1.1.1 - 1110 - perc(1): crot/tamb/2 bongos/whip/cyms - pno - harp - 2 vln.vla.vlc.db

Written for the first concert given by Aquarius

FP: 18.10.83, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London: Aquarius/Nicholas Cleobury

Score and parts for hire

ANTARA (1987)

16 players and electronics

Duration 20 minutes

2 solo fl(=picc) - 2 trbn(tenor+bass) - perc(2): 12 anvil/2 spring coil/4 t.bells/4 siz.cym/4 SD/2 TD/BD/7 mcas - 2 KX88 Yamaha computerized keyboards - 3 vln.2 vla.2 vlc.db

Commissioned by IRCAM for the 10th anniversary of the Pompidou Centre

FP: 25.4.87, Espace de Projection, IRCAM, Paris: Ensemble InterContemporain/George Benjamin

Score 0-571-51071-X on sale, and parts for hire

UPON SILENCE (1990)

mezzo-soprano and 5 viols

Duration 10 minutes

1 treble viol(=bass viol).2 tenor viol.2 bass viol

Text: The Long Legged Fly by William Butler Yeats (Eng)

Written for Fretwork

FP: (complete) 30.10.90, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London: Susan Bickley/Fretwork/George Benjamin

Score 0-571-51251-8 on sale, and parts for hire

UPON SILENCE (1991)

mezzo-soprano and string ensemble of 7 players

Duration 10 minutes

2 vla.3 vlc.2 db

Text: The Long Legged Fly by William Butler Yeats (Eng)

Commissioned by the Opera Bastille, Paris

FP: 21.3.92, Amphitheatre, Opera Bastille, France: Susan Bickley/Ensemble Musique Oblique/George Benjamin

Score 0-571-51578-9 on sale, parts for hire

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA (1993-95)

chamber orchestra of 24 players

Duration 15 minutes

2(I=picc.II=picc+afl).1(=ca).2(II=bcl).bcl(=cbcl).1(=cbsn) - 2.1(=flhn+tppt).1(=euph).0 - perc(2): 2 vib/glspl/5 cym/crot/3 bongos/washing-board/2 mini SD/2 BD/4 gong/2 tam-t - pno(=cel NB 5 octaves) - harp - 3 vln(III=vla).2 vla.2 vlc.2 db

Commissioned by Betty Freeman for the 75th Salzburg Festival

FP: 27.7.95, Salzburg Festival, Mozarteum, Austria: Ensemble Modern/George Benjamin

Score 0-571-51702-1 on sale, parts for hire. Errata list required for score

Excerpt: *Three inventions for Chamber Orchestra*, p. 74

OLICANTUS (2002)

chamber ensemble of 15 players

Duration 4 minutes

2 fl. 2 bcl(I=cl) - 2 hn - perc(2): vib/t.bells - celesta - harp - single strings

Written as a surprise 50th birthday tribute to Oliver Knussen

FP: 12.6.02, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London: London Sinfonietta/George Benjamin

Score 0571-52431-1 on sale, parts for hire

INTO THE LITTLE HILL (2006)

a lyric tale in two parts for soprano, contralto and ensemble of 15 players

Duration 40 minutes

See also under Opera

INSTRUMENTAL

SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO (1977)

Duration 23 minutes

FP: 1977, Westminster School, London: Charles Peebles/George Benjamin

FP: (professional) 16.3.96, Romerbad Musiktage, Badenweiler, Germany: Irvine Arditti/Pierre-Laurent Aimard

Piano score and part 0-571-51758-7 on sale

SONATA FOR PIANO (1977-78)

Duration 22 minutes

FP: 18.5.78, Studio 105, Radio France: George Benjamin

Score 0-571-50578-3 on sale

FLIGHT (1979)

solo flute

Duration 8 minutes

FP: 21.3.80, Studio 105, Radio France: David Lodeon

Score 0-571-50596-1 on sale

SORTILÈGES (1981)

piano

Duration 11 minutes

Written for Paul Crossley to a commission from Northern Arts with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain

FP: 15.7.82, Cheltenham International Festival: Paul Crossley

Score 0-571-50671-2 on sale

THREE STUDIES (1982-85)

Fantasy on Iambic Rhythm (1985); *Meditation on Haydn's Name* (1982); *Relativity Rag* (1984)

piano

Duration 18 minutes

FP: 4.2.86, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London: London

Sinfonietta/George Benjamin

Score 0-571-50948-7 and 0-571-50848-0 on sale

for Michael

VIOLA, VIOLA



Excerpt: opening of Viola, Viola

VIOLA, VIOLA (1997)

viola duo

Duration 10 minutes

Commissioned by the Tokyo Opera City Foundation, of which the Artistic Director was Toru Takemitsu for the opening of Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall

FP: 16.9.97, Tokyo Opera City, Japan: Yuri Bashmet/Nobuko Imai

Study score 0-571-51820-6 and playing score 0-571-51906-7 on sale

SHADOWLINES (2001)

six canonic preludes for piano

Duration 15 minutes

Happily commissioned by Betty Freeman

FP: 13.2.03, Barbican Hall, London: Pierre-Laurent Aimard

Score 0-571-52248-3 on sale

for B. and S. on their 50th

VI



Excerpt: Shadowlines, p. 18

THREE MINIATURES FOR SOLO VIOLIN (2001)

Duration 7 minutes

FP: (A Lullaby for Lalit) 21.1.02, Mumbai, India: Jagdish Mistry

FP: (complete) 8.3.02, Hotel Romerbad, Badenweiler, Germany: Irvine Arditti

Score 0-571-52202-5 on sale

PIANO FIGURES (2004)

10 pieces for solo piano

Duration 14 minutes

ommissioned by Etablissement public Salle de Concerts Grande-Duchesse Joséphine-Charlotte - Philharmonie Luxembourg

FP: 18.5.06, Philharmonie, Luxembourg: Pierre-Laurent Aimard

Score 0-571-52959-3 on sale

BRASS BAND

ALTITUDE (1977)

brass band

Duration 9 minutes

scrt.rctr.4 solo crt.4 crt.3 hn.2 bar.2 trbn.btrbn 2 euph.2 tuba (Eb).2 tuba(BBb) - perc(3): 2 timp/tam-t/2 susp.cym/cyms/xyl/(mar)/t.bells/glsp/SD/BD/tgl

Written for Elgar Howarth and the Grimethorpe Colliery Brass Band

FP: 12.5.79, The University of York, York, UK: Grimethorpe Colliery Brass Band/Elgar Howarth

Score and parts for hire

CHORAL/VOCAL

A MIND OF WINTER (1981)

soprano and orchestra

Duration 10 minutes

See also under *Orchestral*

UPON SILENCE (1990)

mezzo-soprano and 5 viols or mezzo-soprano and string ensemble of 7 players

Duration 10 minutes

See also under *Ensemble/Chamber Orchestra*

SOMETIME VOICES (1996)

baritone solo, SATB chorus and orchestra

Duration 10 minutes

See also under *Orchestral*

ELECTRONICS

PANORAMA (1985)

Tape piece (stereo)

Duration 3 minutes

FP: 14.11.85, IRCAM, Paris, France

Tape for hire

ANTARA (1987)

16 players and electronics

Duration 20 minutes

See also under *Ensemble/Chamber Orchestra*

TRANSCRIPTIONS

PURCELL, HENRY: FANTASIA 7 (1680/1995)

(transcribed by George Benjamin for chamber ensemble of four players in 1995)

Duration 5 minutes

cl - cel (NB 5 octaves) - vln.vlc

Written for the 1995 Aldeburgh Festival, in honour of the tercentenary of Purcell's death

FP: 16.6.95, Aldeburgh Festival, Snape Maltings: George Pieterse/Vera Beths/Anner Bylsma/Reinbert de Leeuw

Score 0-571-51731-5 on sale, parts for hire

DE GRIGNY, NICOLAS: RÉCIT DE TIERCE EN TAILLE

(transcribed for orchestra by George Benjamin in 2004)

Duration 5 minutes

4 picc(I, II, III, IV=afl).ca.3 cl.bcl.cbsn - 3.4.btpt.2.1 - perc(3):
2 glsp/BD - cel - 2 harp - strings (5 vln.3.vla 8.db)

Written for the 2004 BBC Proms

FP: 23.7.04, BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London: Ensemble Modern/George Benjamin

Score and parts for hire

BACH, JS: CANON & FUGUE (from The Art of Fugue)

(transcribed for chamber orchestra ensemble by George Benjamin in 2007)

fl.2 hn.3 vln.2 vla.vlc

Commissioned by the Orchestre de Paris

FP: 16.12.07, Cité de la Musique, Paris: Orchestre de Paris/
Christoph Eschenbach

Score and parts for hire

The image shows a musical score excerpt from 'Upon Silence' by George Benjamin. It features vocal lines with lyrics 'their thought,' and 'pont.' and instrumental accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, dynamics (pp, p, mp, mf), and performance instructions like 'flautando', 'cantabile, lega', and 'poco vibrato'. There is also a section with lyrics 'of the Pope's cha-pel, Keep those chil-dren out.' and further instrumental notation including 'nat.', 'III', 'pizz.', 'arco', and 'sim.'.

Excerpt: *Upon Silence*, p 18

SELECTED REVIEWS BY COUNTRY

UNITED KINGDOM

ANTARA

'...fascinating to hear Benjamin's quite extraordinary ear for harmony and texture ...'

Financial Times (Andrew Clements), 29 September 1987

'...disciplined, engaging, and very beautiful.'

The Observer (Andrew Porter), 1 August 1993

'It starts like an episode of *The Clangers*, those strange panpipe-voiced moonlings, but soon the flutes join in whining and bending their notes like the wind in the eaves, the Yamahas emit not notes but long eerie exhalations, and the trombones rasp loud and deep enough to scare the horses. It was a magnificently unlistenable ghost-train ride into the musical anarchy of post-serialism.'

The Times (Matthew Conway), 5 February 2002

AT FIRST LIGHT

'...a bold piece, reminiscent of Varese in its eruptive force, and another bolt in this young composer's self-discovery.'

The Times (Paul Griffiths), 25 November 1982

'...one of the most important composers of his generation...His conducting is defined by the same features that distinguish his music: a fastidious ear for detail and clarity, combined with an unerring sense of structure and pacing...'

The Guardian (Tom Service), 3 April 2003

'...with Benjamin every work counts and every note justifies its place.'

DANCE FIGURES

'...with Benjamin every work counts and every note justifies its place. That is much the case with *Dance Figures*...as with anything else he has written. In 15 minutes it expresses more than most composers do in an hour. By Benjamin's standards a 15-minute work takes on Wagnerian proportions...The imaginative scope of the music, with its fluent contrasts of character, form and colour, is such that Benjamin must be encouraged to write more for the theatre: it has loosened his creative juices without loss of quality control. *Dance Figures* may be a study in movement but it has just as much to say as pure music. Benjamin leads the ear with such poise and deftness – belying the huge orchestral forces at his disposal – that the listener has barely enough time to register each atmospheric shift. Everything is seamlessly achieved, in a way that makes maximum purchase on minimum outlay. There are harmonic nods to Berg, Debussy and Elgar, but the musical ideas are all unmistakably Benjamin's and there are enough to fill a library, among them a plaintive viola song, a dialogue for bass clarinet and cello, and irregular brassy gallop. The finale really tingles, as if the author has just uncorked the bubbly.'

Financial Times (Andrew Clark), 26 July 2006

'Each of Benjamin's orchestral works...is a miraculously crafted masterpiece, often the result of years of planning and sketching. But *Dance Figures* has a directness and at times a simplicity that is new in his catalogue. In writing a piece for dancers, Benjamin has thinned out the dense layerings and intricate polyphony that often characterises his music. The result, in the nine interlinked sections of *Dance Figures*, is a distillation of his style and an enhancement of its poetry. The first six sections play together and create a single arc of gradually increasing speed and tension. The last three sections telescope and amplify this journey, ending in some of the most

exciting and immediate music Benjamin has ever written...'

The Guardian (Tom Service), 26 July 2006

'...nine characterful movements written to be choreographed, but gripping as a concert work, mysteriously evoking 20th-century orchestration at its most lucid and glamorous.'

The Sunday Times (Paul Driver), 30 July 2006

'...a dazzling parade of images. The virtuosity of the music and its scoring are remarkable...'

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 1 April 2008

DUET

'George Benjamin's *Duet*, his new work for pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard and the Cleveland Orchestra, sounds like no other piece he has ever written - and no other piano concerto in the repertoire. Its premiere at the Lucerne festival, conducted by Franz Welser-Möst, revealed music of startling concentration. *Duet* plays for just 13 minutes, but its expressive and emotional effects are on the largest scale.

...Benjamin signals his intentions right from the start in a terse solo for Aimard, whose crystalline two-part writing cascades into a spiky tutti for the orchestra. The orchestral palette is reduced to a soundworld that matches and amplifies the piano's sonority. Benjamin often pares the piano writing down to single lines, and Aimard duetted with the harp, the timpani, and the disembodied sound of the four double-basses playing high, whistle-like harmonics. Instead of virtuosic figuration, Benjamin's piano in *Duet* produces bell-like chimes in the slower music and laser-like clarity in the faster writing. Most strikingly of all, in the centre of the work, Benjamin writes music of stark intensity, distilled to its essentials: individual notes and chords in the piano part and ghostly flickers of string writing, with staccato tremors in the cellos and harmonics in the violas. There was a physical sense of the music being wrenched into another dimension.'

The Guardian (Tom Service), 2 September 2008

'...music of stark intensity, distilled to its essentials'

'Benjamin's *Duet*, a Roche commission, is as beguiling as it is brief (about 15 minutes) and underlines the differences between piano and orchestra. Lyrical, uncluttered solos of no great virtuosity are juxtaposed against dazzlingly intricate orchestral passages... Pierre-Laurent Aimard – the soloist for whom the piece was written – and the orchestra relished Benjamin's cleansing textures.'

The Sunday Times (Hugh Canning), 7 September 2008

INTO THE LITTLE HILL

'It is a slender, deceptively simple piece. It is the very economy of means – the action is played out around the ensemble, with the two singers sharing the narration and playing all the roles with a minimum of props – that gives the work its elegance and poetic power.

...If the political resonances are clear enough Crimp never labours them, while the deftness of Benjamin's vocal writing weaves it into a spellbinding piece of storytelling. Each role is effortlessly characterised: the minister's delivery clipped, matter-of-fact; the

stranger's soprano lines spiralling ever higher. All are wrapped in the most luminous score, subtly coloured by basset horns, cornets and a cimbalom, and later by banjo and mandolin too, while the stranger's seductive music is given to a solo bass flute snaking through the textures.

If composing for the stage has opened up new areas of expression for Benjamin, the result is more ravishing than anyone could possibly have imagined.'

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 25 November 2006

'...it was the eerie beauty and uncanny originality of the music that made the dominant impression on me. The scoring is remarkable – for a sort of 'alienated' folk band... There are passages of ethereal delicacy, silken slowness, but these are contrasted with sudden fierceness, as in Benjamin's recent orchestral Palimpsests. Bass timbres are beguiling, the tutti sound is at once bizarre and delectable: I wanted more of it.'

The Sunday Times (Paul Driver), 3 December 2006

'In my critical career, I've witnessed the birth of several fine new operas... But in all that time I have never heard or seen anything so startlingly or brilliantly original as Into the Little Hill. 'Masterpiece' is not a word to fling about, but I'm tempted...

Conductor, instrumentalists and performers are integrated on stage, the singers being two uncostumed women who pace up and down sodium-lit catwalks as they narrate the story and enact it, playing several different characters and combining to embody the chorus.

George Benjamin's score is a miracle. Fifteen players – here drawn from the Ensemble Modern – are used to create a hyper-intense sound world. Not a note is wasted or superfluous – Benjamin's ear is unerringly precise, and the sonorities he conjures up by combining conventional instruments with basset-horn, flugelhorn and cimbalom are quite ravishing.

But this isn't an orchestral showpiece. The vocal lines are the driving force, and although the writing is often angular and abrupt, it is also richly expressive and alluring... if you have any serious interest in opera, you simply must hear it.'

The Daily Telegraph (Rupert Christiansen), 18 June 2007

'...Benjamin's score is a miracle'

'...there's always a place for music this strong, this tensile and expressive. The interweaving of voices and instruments, song and narration, belatedly announces Benjamin as an outstanding opera talent; and with an instrumentation embracing two basset horns, tingling cimbalom, and the earthworm gropings of the contrabass clarinet... Ensemble Modern and the conductor Franck Ollu delivered the goods with pride... Benjamin should definitely write more operas.'

The Times (Geoff Brown), 21 April 2008

'George Benjamin's 'lyric tale' Into the Little Hill is a jewel-like piece of music-theatre...

Martin Crimp's enigmatic and contemporary re-imagining of the Pied Piper fable has been ravishingly illuminated by George Benjamin's music. The scoring is slight, with the 15 instrumentalists of the Ensemble Modern often doubling on exotic instruments, and only two singers. But what a pair.

The Crowd music is punchy and abrasive, the Stranger's chillingly seductive, the Minister's loftily arrogant and the Minister's Wife (when she realises her child has gone) stumbling and numb. But this is to simplify a remarkable sound-world in which complex characterisations and layers are thrillingly refined.

...there is no lack of realism and impact in Into the Little Hill when the two vocalists project the words of the story and its emotional subtext so powerfully and convincingly. The Ensemble Modern, under Franck Ollu, makes a marvellously lucid contribution, lyrically intense and always perfectly balanced.

The wealth of invention, remarkable textural ingenuity and particularly imaginative use of the instruments mark out the score as a miniature masterpiece.'

The Independent (Lynne Walker), 1 May 2008

'When I first heard George Benjamin's one-act opera Into the Little Hill two years ago, I tentatively suggested that it might be a masterpiece...

A second hearing, in a superb performance by the Opera Group authoritatively conducted by the composer, confirms my judgement that this is something quite exceptional, both in the originality of its form and the depth of its inspiration.

Benjamin's score inhabits the text with absolute assurance: not a note is wasted, the dramatic pacing is impeccable controlled.

The word setting is always pellucid and sometimes lyrical, the orchestration... luminous, subtle and delicate.

Most strikingly imaginative of all, however, is the way that Benjamin creates a world of sound, quite unlike any other.

...it left me both stunned and elated. A masterpiece, no question.'

The Telegraph (Rupert Christiansen), 16 February 2009

'A masterpiece, no question.'

'If the best test for any music is whether it retains its power whatever the circumstances, then Benjamin's score passed triumphantly. It is a transcendently beautiful piece, perfectly scaled to Martin Crimp's taut libretto...

Benjamin's conducting brought out pungent colours in the ensemble writing that enhanced the dramatic power more than ever.'

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 16 February 2009

'...it was mesmerising. There was nowhere to hide from Booth's marvelously angry, protesting Child and Bickley's mendacious Minister, slyly making a pact to exterminate the rats... Nor from the visceral power of Benjamin's score – by turns eerie, abrasive, sad and lyrical.'

The Times (Richard Morrison), 16 February 2009

JUBILATION

'...a brilliant exercise in the integration of children's voices and school instruments with the resources of a large orchestra.'

The Times (Gerald Lamer), 12 October 1999

A MIND OF WINTER

'In sheer precision and beauty of sound, this nine-minute work is wonderfully impressive ...'

The Observer (Stephen Walsh), 24 January 1982

'Every one of Benjamin's pieces is a model of concision and directness, but there is something special about the vividness of A Mind of Winter, his setting of a Wallace Stevens poem for soprano and chamber orchestra. He captured the atmosphere of Steven's winter with a sequence of chilling gestures: flurries of high woodwind and string writing that sounded like a biting winter, and the frosty brilliance of string harmonics and glissandos. The piece not only evoked the sounds of winter, it conjured the psychological world of the poem. The vocal line seemed to float free of the surrounding texture, as if the singer were intruding upon a natural landscape.'

The Guardian (Tom Service), 6 December 2002

'Benjamin's A Mind of Winter, a setting of Wallace Stevens's poem The Snow Man, wasted no time in plunging the temperature. Strings and suspended cymbals opened into a frozen A minor chord; the wind whistled and howled.'

The Times (Geoff Brown), 7 December 2002

OCTET

'...the sheer technical aplomb of the work continues to amaze. Benjamin wrote it when he was eighteen; the beautifully dappled structure and wonderfully imagined effects seem to evidence a far deeper maturity.'

Financial Times (Andrew Clements), 24 February 1987

PALIMPSESTS

'...bound together by a curiously archaic-sounding passage for three clarinets, which underpins all that follows, transforming itself along the way. In the new Palimpsest the binding element is binary – violent, abrupt brass chords cutting across sustained translucent writing for high woodwind and strings – and the music that results is far more discursive and varied. There are some ravishingly imaginative ideas, a lonely horn solo over rustling percussion one of the most remarkable and the musical voice is totally distinct – as if an element of Sibelius had been integrated with the modernist tradition that Benjamin sustains so unswervingly.'

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 7 October 2002

'There is an ancient and religious tone to the chorale-like base material, and what happens to it seems to tell us something about the corruption of innocence or even of the flesh. Each piece rises through squirming counterpoint to a brass climax of tragic grandeur. Gripping and lucid, this is marvellous and disturbing music.'

The Evening Standard (Brian Hunt), 7 October 2002

'Benjamin has created an absorbing addition to the symphonic repertoire. The new work picks up the themes of structural, textural and motivic overlay suggested in its prototype – on a bigger scale and in weightier language, with tensile strings vying with volcanic brass in a quasi-Sibelian undertow of argument and suggestion, but with a Ravel-like gift for ravishing the ear with every note.'

Financial Times (Andrew Clark), 8 October 2002

'...music of immense subtlety and fascination.'

Daily Telegraph (Ivan Hewett), 24 July 2004

'...teasing and surprising play of motifs, volcanic mood swings and timbres both fastidious and bizarre...'

The Times (Geoff Brown), 26 July 2004

RINGED BY THE FLAT HORIZON

'...has a mastery many labour half a life-time to acquire.'

The Observer (Peter Heyworth), 31 August 1980

'...Benjamin's music seems to stop time, as fragments of the storm are suspended in mid-air: a cor anglais melody, an impassioned cello solo. The work opens and closes with the same gesture, a quiet bell chord, as if the whole piece has been a slow elaboration of a single moment, the still centre of a tornado.'

The Guardian (Tom Service), 11 July 2003

'[Benjamin] led an electrifying performance that captured the music's extremes of sudden stormy violence and uncanny stillness.'

Daily Telegraph (Ivan Hewett), 7 August 2008

'No British composer since Benjamin Britten announced himself so decisively as George Benjamin did in 1980 with his first orchestral work Ringed by the Flat Horizon when he was 19 and a first-year undergraduate at Cambridge. Almost 30 years later, it still seems a wondrous achievement, with the formal confidence, understanding of instrumental colour and texture, and lucid harmonic sense that have characterised his music ever since...'

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 8 August 2008

SHADOWLINES

'The result is absorbing, by turns wirily thematic and luminously impressionistic, and always precisely imagined for Aimard's exceptional gifts.'

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 15 February 2003

'Shadowlines, a masterly piece in six 'canons'. Each of them stretches the old canon-form in some different way, superbly conceived...It has the transparent density, variety and concision of a Haydn symphony – and real innigkeit, and even comedy too, for it's far more than a brilliant academic-pianistic exercise. It stands to tonality as the poet Cavafy was said to stand to the universe, 'at a slight angle'.

Financial Times (David Murray), 19 February 2003

'...the striking thing was how free they felt, almost as if Benjamin were improvising them on the spot... The way Benjamin maintained a repeating bass at a rock-steady pianissimo, while unleashing a fortissimo tumult all around it, was the most spellbinding part of the evening.'

The Daily Telegraph (Ivan Hewett), 25 May 2005

SOMETIME VOICES

'...a setting ...of Caliban's Tempest lines about the magical music that fills the isle. There's a fine contrast of his loud but awe-struck reflections and the variety of delicate, elusive musics and voices – twangling, humming, lulling, menacing.'

The Observer (Andrew Porter), 15 September 1996

'An atmospheric and subtly orchestrated piece, it compels attention from the opening wisps of sound on xylophone and mandolin, threading its way through forceful baritone phrases (William Dazeley, excellent) and Daphnis-like choral spirits into a perfectly-paced crescendo before dying away in a trance.'

Financial Times (Andrew Clark), 16 September 1996

'...refined aural sensibility and meticulous craftsmanship'

'...this dazzlingly conceived nine-minute tour de force...a mobile mosaic of beauty and subtlety.'

The Times (Barry Millington), 20 August 1998

'...refined aural sensibility and meticulous craftsmanship...What we experience, in this haunting soundscape of shifting metres, cross-currents of orchestral breath and vibration, baffling fragments of calling and humming voices, are not only the magical sounds themselves, but Caliban's own responses. His frissons of sensuous delight, his bewilderment, above all – in a brilliantly achieved orchestral climax – his inchoate terror are all musicked into being.'

The Times (Hilary Finch), 6 May 2003

SUDDEN TIME

'...an iridescent, unsettling, strangely beautiful score.'

The Observer (Andrew Porter), 25 July 1993

'...perhaps the most impressive, motivated handling of orchestral forces in an output which has always demonstrated an extraordinary control of large forms. And the most telling of its time-tricks is that it compacts such a fecundity of ideas into a duration that, you are astonished to discover, barely exceeds 15 minutes. It feels twice as long; and I don't say that as criticism. Merely, as a tribute to the substance, depth and technical accomplishment of an outstanding score.'

The Independent on Sunday (Michael White), 25 July 1993

'...plays games with tempo and irregular pulse in a sound-world that is pure Benjamin: translucence, kaleidoscopic colouring and an almost pointillist approach to presenting his ideas...an authoritative exploration of this fascinating score.'

The Daily Telegraph (Matthew Rye), 10 June 2003

THREE MINIATURES FOR SOLO VIOLIN

'...Benjamin's pieces were beautifully constructed essays in restraint.'

The Guardian (Tom Service), 24 June 2002

'[Three Miniatures] Brimful of character, these little pieces are a real gem for the repertoire...'

The Independent (Keith Potter), 31 May 2005

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

'...utterly new and original; it is dazzling, and, like the music of few composers, it makes its points swiftly and wastes none of its notes. The first part, in memory of Benjamin's teacher, Messiaen, sets up a quiet rippling texture over which a flugelhorn attempts to fly, and is brought repeatedly back to earth; the second is an extravagant, tiny caprice with increasingly florid wind solos. The last, and the most effective, is a ghost of a funeral march, with thudding bass drums and gongs punctuating a grand processional in the depths of the orchestra. It isn't a long movement, but the emotional impact of the contrabassoon's throaty yell, with which it starts, or the dreadful noise of two enormous bass drums thrumming at the outer edge of

audibility, is out of all proportion to the modest means and scale Benjamin uses. A first-rate piece; and we won't, I think, have to wait long before hearing it again, and again.'

Daily Telegraph (Philip Hensher), 21 November 1995

'...music that grows naturally and effortlessly out of its melodic germs, and moves with absolute certainty in ever-changing instrumental colours.'

The Guardian, 20 August 1997

THREE STUDIES FOR SOLO PIANO

'...were not just impressive: they seemed to enter the repertoire before one's very ears.'

The Sunday Times (Paul Driver), 9 February 1986

'...they seemed to enter the repertoire before one's very ears.'

UPON SILENCE

'...I am struck by its accomplishment and potent imagination. The voice, now languid, now darling, hovers over and around the viols like the long-legged fly of the Yeats poem on which the work is based.'

The Times (Tess Knighton), 28 October 1996

'This is a remarkable work, a setting of Yeats' 'Long-Legged Fly', where Benjamin has found a newly expressive sound world - rasping colours in rich dissonant chords, pizzicato and tremolo effects. And in his use of the voice in hesitant parlando style, the claustrophobic nature of the poem is decisively captured.'

The Independent (Annette Morreau), 30 October 1996

VIOLA, VIOLA

'...This was knockabout stuff with the violas teasing each other, rasping, snarling, dancing, carousing, and poking each other in the ribs. Glorious.'

The Herald, Glasgow (Michael Tumelty), 17 July 1998

'...another triumph for strangeness of timbre. This nine-minute movement transforms a soundworld usually associated with the teaching room into something like a symphonic drama. The two instruments are yoked into meticulous, furious dialogue... The sheer density of argument that Benjamin packs in is astonishing and ...totally gripping.'

The Sunday Times (Paul Driver), 19 July 1998

'...a tour de force of another kind, which takes the most unpromising combination of instruments - two violas - and creates a totally gripping world. The lines cross with bewildering complexity, creating an extraordinary trompe l'oreille; it's as if a whole orchestra of strings is there, each with its own sharply defined musical line.'

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 14 March 2000

USA

ANTARA

'Benjamin augurs well to become the most important British composer of his generation...a 20-minute essay that dazzles as much for its textures (from lush strings to the wham of an orchestral anvil) as it does for its alert rhythmic scheme.'

San Francisco Examiner, 29 September 1989

'sounds merge with the live sounds of flutes, brass, percussion and strings. So complete is the sonic transformation by the end that one can't be sure which is live, which is Memorex.'

If this sounds like a simplistic duel between folkloric naiveté and machine-like intellectual rigor, it isn't. The synthesized Peruvian panpipe sounds and loud clangs derived from 'playing' the pipe

work of the Centre Pompidou (where IRCAM is housed) float through the subtly colourful textures like ghostly echoes of a past very ancient and very new. Seldom in any live electronic work have spontaneity and calculation coexisted so masterfully.'

Chicago Tribune (John von Rhein), 23 March 2004

'...A cityscape of energy in sound...'

New York Times (Bernard Holland), 20 May 2006

AT FIRST LIGHT

'...Benjamin is carrying forward a tradition of nature painting in music; he has found a way to translate qualities of silvery light into sound along with the sounds of a night that is going to sleep and a morning that is coming awake. The orchestra is small, but the range of colour and sonority is large. The music suggests animation, of life being breathed in and exhaled, it is sensuously immediate yet full of unexplained mysteries. Benjamin is evocative, never literal, and At First Light is atmospheric in the way that Ravel is: something nebulous and indefinable arises from precision of ear and utmost attention to detail.'

The Boston Globe (Richard Dyer), 28 July 1999

DANCE FIGURES

'Its nine, mostly brief sections were vibrantly colored...Benjamin's music grabs our attention from all directions, but he makes sure that we feel a sense of underlying logic even though we might be hard pressed to define it precisely. The CSO sounded like a band of individual virtuosos in his lively, intricate textures.'

Chicago Sun Times (Wynne Delacombe), 21 May 2005

'Contrasts abound. In the fourth scene, a lone oboe tries unsuccessfully to assert itself over bellicose blasts of brass. No 6 is a menacing noise machine, all growling brassy and eruptive percussion, a metrical tug of war for full orchestra that is the most arresting music in the piece. As ever the fastidious ear for detail and clarity of texture that have led British critics to rhapsodize over Benjamin were much to be admired.'

Chicago Tribune (John von Rhein), 21 May 2005

DUET

'...the piece is unusually scored for a small orchestra consisting of harp, winds, timpani, celesta and violas, cellos, and basses - but surprisingly, no violins. Every detail counts in Benjamin's episodic and invigorating writing...'

It's an intriguing and skilfully crafted work, and this compelling performance by soloist and orchestra deserves many more listenings.'

Beacon Journal (Elaine Guregian), 26 September 2008

'The title Duet is precisely correct. An intimate chamber-music atmosphere pervades the 15-minute work, scored for small orchestra minus violins, and the piece unfolds as a collaborative give-and-take.'

An imaginative exploration of instrumental timbre, Duet seeks to blur distinctions between piano and orchestra. Rather than struggle against each other, as in many concerts, the two forces set about finding common ground.

The overlaps are spine tingling. Anyone listening with closed eyes could easily conflate piano and woodblock, piano and trombone, harp and bass, instrument that usually function as polar opposites. Welser-Möst led with cool, unobtrusive authority, and the orchestra responded with tonal purity. Aimard often playing single notes was a sensitive, vibrant partner, confirming Duet as an experiment worth repeating.'

The Plain Dealer (Zachary Lewis), 27 September 2008

INTO THE LITTLE HILL

'Into the Little Hill came across as a haunting, musically complex, ingeniously scored and often disturbing piece. In one stroke, Mr Benjamin is claiming a place amid the rich experimental operatic works of British composers like Harrison Birtwistle and Judith Weir. ...the overall impact of the female voices against the colourful chamber ensemble, rich with the unusual sonorities of a bass flute and even a banjo, conveyed the emotional and psychological force that the opera was after.'

This score confirmed earlier impressions of Mr Benjamin's formidable music. There are elements of Berg-like chromaticism, the zigzagging

atonal lines of the Boulez school, wondrous French-imbued sonorities and the nitty-gritty of intricate contrapuntal writing for the instruments. Though Mr Benjamin does not disguise the sources of his inspiration, his audacious music sounds fresh and authentic.'

The New York Times (Anthony Tommasini), 28 July 2007

'The novel beauties of the instrumental writing, such as the admixture of cymbals to an eerie duet of basset horns, or enigmatic conversations between a bass flute and a cimbalom, cast a spell, yet the net effect was of loveliness coiled into dread.'

The New Yorker (Alex Ross), 20 August 2007

A MIND OF WINTER

'This is a beautiful piece... the handling of colors, the command of textures, and the subtlety of harmonies are almost uncannily fine.'

The New Yorker (Andrew Porter), 21 December 1987

PALIMPSESTS

'...has the stark, almost painful clarity of a movie set at night. It begins with a comforting murmur of clarinets, slowly ravelling into three separate but similar sounds until the quiet is cut by a single, savage stroke of brass ...does not have a dull or superfluous moment.'

Newsday, New York (Justin Davidson), 15 March 2000

'...enthraling exercises in the operation of musical intelligence through dramatic sound...the performances blazed.'

The Boston Globe (Richard Dyer), 23 July 2003

RINGED BY THE FLAT HORIZON

'The work contains some of the most startlingly precise storm music ever written - it seems less evocation than the sound of the thing itself. But there is more to it than that: Eliot's lines suggested form for the music, and the piece is music, and not just illustration. It moves through an original and convincing musical logic which is realized through a masterly control of varied sonorities.'

Boston Globe (Richard Dyer), September 1987

SHADOWLINES

'...the first major piano work of the 21st century...Technical rigour and ingenuity lie behind everything, as they do in Bach; but as in Bach, they disappear in the expression of feeling—the impression of the piece is of free fantasy. And it is wonderfully laid out for the instrument.'

The Boston Globe (Richard Dyer), 22 July 2003

'...Shadowlines uses canonic technique in experimental ways. The imitating voices are sometimes transfigured: intervals are inverted, ferocious dissonance becomes delicate consonance.'

The New York Times (Anthony Tommasini), 31 March 2007

SOMETIME VOICES

'The British composer George Benjamin's Sometime Voices, in its US premiere, was much anticipated and did not disappoint... a mystical masterpiece.'

The New York Times (Anthony Tommasini), 28 July 1999

'a mystical masterpiece.'

'...a masterpiece, George Benjamin's Sometime Voices ...The orchestra summons a magic and mysterious music; Caliban gulps and wonders; the chorus chants his name in benign and threatening ways. There is a glorious, whirlwind climax, and then Caliban is left alone wondering, 'when I waked, I cried to dream again.' The piece somehow sums up all the powers of music, how it helps us to understand our world while its substance somehow eludes understanding; Benjamin's music glitters, consoles, alarms, then disappears.'

The Boston Globe (Richard Dyer), 28 July 2000

SORTILÈGES

'...fresh, beautifully constructed, harmonically bewitching, and sensitively written for the instrument.'

The New Yorker (Andrew Porter), 12 May 1986

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

'Benjamin's music is full of paint and shards of stained glass, and wonderful moments in which distant, somber pronouncements from the brass make themselves heard through clouds of sparks and smoke.'

LA Weekly (Alan Rich), 27 November 1998

'...These are studies in textures evoked masterfully from a chamber orchestra... Benjamin opened up a wonderful galaxy of sonorities here, while never neglecting the pulse that unites them into a glittering mosaic.'

San Francisco Examiner (Allan Ulrich), 7 May 1999

'...a wonderful galaxy of sonorities...'

VIOLA, VIOLA

'For 10 beguiling minutes, the two instruments take turns offering fierce or lyrical outbursts, either individually or in close-knit counterpoint...The effect is mesmerizing...'

San Francisco Chronicle (Joshua Kosman), 7 May 1999

'(Viola, Viola) ...offered arresting evidence of Mr. Benjamin's keen ear for instrumental sonority and texture. The viola is typically considered a mellow instrument. This mercurial duo, a study in contrasts with pensive passages of sustained harmony, pugnacious outbursts, obsessive repetitions and eerie colorings, sounds as if it were scored for an orchestra of violas...'

The New York Times (Anthony Tommasini), 31 March 2007

AUSTRALIA

A MIND OF WINTER

'...the orchestral writing shows a mastery of delight in colors that seem to move about with restless rapidity.'

The Age (Melbourne) (Clive O'Connell), 12 September 1994

RINGED BY THE FLAT HORIZON

'This work is arresting for its power and menace'

The Age (Melbourne) (Clive O'Connell), 12 September 1994

VIOLA VIOLA

'George Benjamin's Viola Viola, was remarkable for its strong architectural span, concentration and for the symphonic conception which it brought from these two usually retiring instruments.'

Sydney Morning Herald (Peter McCallum), 13 January 2003

AUSTRIA

AT FIRST LIGHT

'...Benjamin revealed an incredible sense of timbre and a precise technique of instrumentation which is unrivalled among his fellow composers. His precedence in both spheres was highlighted most vividly in At First Light ...a masterpiece, which literally throws the whole concept of 'new music' into complete confusion...'

Salzberger Nachrichten (Reinhurst Kannonier), 30 March 1991

INTO THE LITTLE HILL

'Das dunkel-samtene Timbre von Bassetthörnern und Kontrabassklarinette zieht sich als bedrohlich-schöner roter Faden

durch die Partitur, in der auch denkbar harsche und grelle Sounds wie Echos eines naturalistischen Komponierstils ertönen: kratzendes Schlagzeug, ein blechernes Banjo, die (hier gar nicht ungarisch tönende) Exotik eines Zymbal. Beschwörend tönt des Rattenfängers arabischenhaft-ruhige Bassflöten-Kantilene, deren Magie Ratten wie Kinder in ihren Bann zieht. Beklemmend, wie zuletzt das Referieren des Textes angesichts der abziehenden Kinder zerbröckelt und mitfühlender Identifikation Platz macht.

Hilary Summers fasziniert mit androgynem Alt-Klang, während Anu Komsu zwischen dramatischer Attacke und ätherischem Säuseln beinahe makellos durch alle, zumal hohe Lagen turnt. Angesichts solcher musikalischer Qualität kann nur ein Snob bedauern, dass das Recht der ersten Nacht bereits 2006 vom Pariser Festival d'Automne beansprucht worden ist und die Produktion schon in Frankfurt, New York und Amsterdam zu sehen war. Schmerzlich dagegen, dass in Wien nur zwei Aufführungen zu erleben sind!

Die Presse (Walter Weidringer), 5 June 2008

‘eine suggestive, völlig uneitle, betörend schöne, gut hörbare, flirrend-leuchtende Musik...’

‘George Benjamins erstes Musiktheaterwerk überzeugt - Sängerinnen Anu Komsu und Hilary Summers mit faszinierender Leistung. Es begann so gleißend hell, dass man die Augen schließen musste. Und es wurde ein faszinierender Beitrag zum Musikprogramm der Wiener Festwochen: Into the Little Hill, das erste Musiktheaterwerk des gefeierten britischen Komponisten George Benjamin nach einem Text von Martin Crimp, beeindruckte im Jugendstiltheater mit minimaler Optik (Inszenierung: Daniel Jeanneteau) und maximaler Ausdruckskraft. Fabelhaft in der zeitlosen Adaption des ‘Rattenfänger von Hameln’-Stoffes die beiden Sängerinnen Anu Komsu und Hilary Summers, viel Applaus gab es auch für das Ensemble Modern unter Franck Ollu.’

Austria Presse Agentur, 5 June 2008

‘George Benjamin hat dazu eine suggestive, völlig uneitle, betörend schöne, gut hörbare, flirrend-leuchtende Musik geschrieben, die sich nicht im theoretischen Elfenbeinturm versteckt, sondern wirkt. Zwei Sänger (hier die Sopranistin Anu Komsu und die hinreißende Altistin Hilary Summers) gestalten und singen alle Figuren. Sie flüstern, wispern, keifen oder kommentieren lakonisch die Ereignisse. Und das fantastische Ensemble Modern unter der Leitung von Franck Ollu - er hat schon die Pariser Uraufführung 2006 dirigiert - steuert herrlichste, dynamisch feinst abgestufte Klänge bei[...] Jubel.’

Kurier (Peter Jarolin), 6 June 2008

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

‘These three very different movements, held together by an inner logic, epitomise Benjamin’s musical language: the imaginative approach to colour, the lyrical melodic lines, interesting well thought-out rhythmic structures (1st and 2nd movements) as well as the ability to catch fleeting moods, as, for example, in the closing elegy.’

Die Presse (Edith Jachimowicz), 29 July 1995

BELGIUM

A MIND OF WINTER

‘...une grande séduction, un sens remarquable de l’écriture instrumentale, avec les moyens tout simples de l’orchestre mozartien, une poésie raffinée ...’

Le Soir (Jacques Mairel), 2 December 1984

SUDDEN TIME

‘C’est une oeuvre forte et séduisante, dont la puissance d’expression ne se relâche à aucun moment. George Benjamin confirme une

maîtrise totale de l’écriture orchestrale, dans des coloris dosés avec subtilité et imagination.’

Le Soir (Michel Debrocq), 3 March 1997

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

‘... this beautiful work confirms Benjamin’s stature among contemporary composers.’

The Bulletin (Patrice Liebermann), 27 March 1997

DENMARK

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

‘The conductor George Benjamin’s clear-minded, sensitive attention to detail and generously extrovert musical personality were evident in his melodically pleasing, harmonically fresh and distinctly coloured Three Inventions... With his superbly inventive and effective instrumentation the production unites great spontaneity with great refinement.’

Politiken (Jon Jacoby), 18 December 2003

‘Benjamin’s Viola, Viola...is a compositional tour de force.’

VIOLA VIOLA

‘Benjamin’s Viola, Viola...is a compositional tour de force.’

Politiken (Jon Jacoby), 18 December 2003

FINLAND

SUDDEN TIME

‘...a skilfully crafted musical jewel that radiates endless sound colours and changes of pulse...’

Aamulehti (Tampere), August 1999

‘The writing was sometimes as transparent as a butterfly’s wings, at others richly sharp. Sometimes it stood breathlessly still, sometimes it came out in a whirling frenzy...’

Hufvudstadsbladet (Helsinki), August 1999

FRANCE

ANTARA

‘...une telle originalité de ton, une telle nature juvenile et effervescente, et surtout une telle infailibilité dans les alliages sonores captivent immédiatement l’attention.’

Le Monde de la Musique (Patrick Szersnovicz), November 1987

AT FIRST LIGHT

‘Une Révélation ensuite, celle d’un Anglais de vingt-trois ans, George Benjamin, dont At First Light, place sous l’invocation de Turner, a quelque chose de frais et de vigoureux, un e vie exubérante qui s’ébroue avec bonheur dans les sons, où il decèle avec une sorte d’infailibilité les heureuses alliances d’instruments, les motifs et les procédés expressifs.’

Le Monde (Jacques Lonchampt), 22 November 1983

DANCE FIGURES

‘...Dance Figures est une pièce à destination chorégraphique, le rythme y est plus ludique, plus net. Les couleurs abondent, les solos se libèrent et Benjamin joue avec des références inattendues, comme celle, dans la deuxième partie, d’une ‘tierce en taille’ à la manière des organistes français de l’époque baroque, un récit ornementé ‘auréole’ de ses harmoniques naturelles artificiellement

récréées dans une page magique.’

Le Monde (Renaud Machart), 27 September 2005

‘Un jeu de contrastes maîtrisés à la perfection.’

‘Un jeu de contrastes maîtrisés à la perfection. Jamais une mesure de trop qui pourrait ravalier tel passage gratifiant au rang d’effet artificiel. Jamais une page en creux pour souffler entre deux morceaux de bravoure. Rien que des traits d’esprit, à l’instar de ces tuttis aux allures de Klaxon de luxe qui tentent d’éteindre les conciliabules des petites percussions. Benjamin se distingue dans l’art d’extirper les sons des instruments.’

Le Monde (Pierre Gervasoni), 21 December 2006

DUET

‘La musique de Duet fonctionne par contagions et affinités entre le soliste et l’orchestre, de sorte qu’un terrain commun en constant hybridation deviant l’aire de jeu principale et commune. Duet est une musique raffinée, savant mais ludique où la virtuosité digitale est rare (le début notamment, une cadence introductive pour le clavier seul). L’on entend surtout de longues melodies en cantus firmus à l’ancienne, dans le grave de piano, des interjections minérales dans l’aigu – une austérité que peu ont osé dans un cadre concertant... L’impression la plus touchante qu’on retient de Duet après cette première audition est celle d’un voyage au long cours aux paysages changeants et pourtant contenu dans un temps extrêmement condensé.’

Le Monde (Renaud Machart), 1 September 2008

‘Duet est une musique raffinée, savant mais ludique où la virtuosité digitale est rare...’

INTO THE LITTLE HILL

‘...respire magnifiquement en dépit d’une tension quasi permanente. L’écriture est claire, même si elle privilégie les textures graves, chuchotées dans un tréfonds à la lumière sonore subtilement sous-saturée...excellamment interprété, est aussi exigeant que médusant.’

Le Monde (Renaud Machart), 24 November 2006

‘...une demi-heure d’une fascinante concentration...Ce qui frappe dans la musique de Benjamin, qui se densifie en se raréfiant, c’est une richesse harmonique dont on cherche en vain la trace chez ses contemporains...on s’incline devant un très grand musicien, servi par des interprètes d’exception...’

Le Figaro (Christian Merlin), 25 November 2006

‘... la contralto Hilary Summers et la soprano Anu Komsî traduisent avec engagement les figures incisives et les éclats poétiques de cette partition conjugant diatonisme et chromatisme. Si l’on est sensible à cette écriture austère et lyrique, c’est l’extase.’

Libération (Éric Dahan), 24 November 2006

PALIMPSESTS

‘Palimpsests, en donne un aperçu magique. D’abord autour d’un trouble motif des bois qui vient hanter, à la manière d’un serpent de mer, l’étendue limpide de l’orchestre puis dans une dérive collective vers un rugissement inouï.’

Le Monde (Pierre Gervasoni), 21 December 2006

SOMETIME VOICES

‘Sometime Voices semble en fait une scène d’opéra ...(il) semble

bénéficier du redoutable savoir technique des récentes pièces (Sudden Time, Three Inventions) et retrouver la poésie merveilleuse de ses premières oeuvres (At First Light, A Mind of Winter) ...L’orchestre illustre les sons ‘zinguants’ évoqués par des cordes pincées (harpes, banjo, mandolines, pizzicati), le chœur incarne, comme un ensemble de violes en sourdine une musique des sphères étrange, comme une polyphonie de la Renaissance décadrée, mouvante.’

Le Monde (Renaud Machart), 25 August 1998

SUDDEN TIME

‘...Benjamin écrit une musique complexe mais jamais compliquée. L’on pense à la capacité qu’avait Sibelius de gérer simultanément des événements sonores dans un espace large où évoluent les lignes et les couleurs ...un voyage sonore merveilleux, dense et infiniment renouvelé.’

Le Monde (Renaud Machart), August 1994

THREE MINIATURES FOR SOLO VIOLIN

‘...Les Three Miniatures (pour violon) qui suivent installent la tendresse du conte. Expert en caractérisation, Benjamin déploie ensuite un polyphonie rigoureuse et imaginative, en mouvement.’

Libération (Éric Dahan), 24 November 2006

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

‘...a accroche son auditoire. Surpris, d’abord, par sa forme: trois phrases de quelques minutes chacune, abruptement interrompues comme un rêve. Etonne, ensuite, par la personnalité qui transpire de composition ...Séduit, enfin, par l’invention de George Benjamin, dont la technique d’orchestration vaut bien celle, audacieuse en son temps, d’un Strauss.’

Liberation (Paris), 1 August 1995

GERMANY

AT FIRST LIGHT

‘Ein ausserordentlich intensives und ausdrucksstarkes Werk, eine brillante Aufführung ...’

Die Zeit (Heinz Josef Herbort), 30 November 1990

INTO THE LITTLE HILL

‘...eine Klangarchitektur von surrealer Schönheit und Anziehungskraft...Viel Applaus für ein gelungenes Beispiel zukunftsweisenden Musiktheaters.’

Hanauer Anzeiger (Klaus-Dieter Schüssler), 12 November 2007

‘Die stimmliche Präsenz und souverän versammelte Ausdruckskraft beider Sängerinnen ist eindrucksvoll und raumfüllend, man würde ihnen jede andere Geschichte abnehmen. Franck Ollu und das Ensemble Modern realisieren eine präzise ausgeführte Fülle an Klangfarben in dynamischer Feinstabstimmung mit den beiden Sängerinnen, so dass die Musik ein faszinierend kompaktes Geschehen bildet, eine anheimelnde und ungewohnte Klangwelt, die leuchtende Inseln in den düsteren Raum bringt... eine arrondierte Umgebung von gleichmäßig hoher Intensität. Niemand will hier einen Mythos entzaubern, niemand gräbt im kleinen Hügel nach den Tatsachen.’

Frankfurter Rundschau (Hans Jürgen Linke), 12 November 2007

‘Die verschiedenen Ebenen von Bild, Wort, Szene und Musik verschränken sich in sich und verlaufen quer übereinander, das macht den Abend spannend. „Je tiefer wir graben, desto heller brennt seine Musik“, heißt es abschließend im Text. Dass es wirklich so ist, verdankt man Frank Ollu und dem wie immer kompetent und konzentriert aufspielenden Ensemble modern;’

Neue Presse (Andreas Bomba Frankfurter), 13 November 2007

‘George Benjamin’s musikdramatisches Debüt kennzeichnet eine enorme Freiheit der musikalischen Gestaltung, die jedoch formal sehr streng gearbeitet ist. Das Ensemble Modern, dem Komponisten langjährig verbunden, garantierte einen nuanciert-einlässlichen Zugriff.’

Offenbach-Post (Stefanmi Chalzik), 14 November 2007

‘...eine enorme Freiheit der musikalischen Gestaltung, die jedoch formal sehr streng gearbeitet ist.’

‘Mit großer stimmlicher Differenzierungsfähigkeit und tragfähiger sonorer Tiefe ließ Hilary Summers die ihr zugewiesenen Charaktere lebendig werden. Anu Komsu zeigte ihr breites klangliches Gestaltungsvermögen vom lyrischen pianissimo bis zum schrillen Extrem laut... - die Musik Benjamins ist von berückender Intensität und konzeptioneller Weitsicht und kann möglicherweise einmal richtungsweisend werden in der heute fast unüberschaubaren Pluralität der Neuen-Musik-Landschaft.’

Allgemeine Zeitung (Anita Kolbus Gießener), November 2007

‘Benjamins Kalngerfindungen sind von magischer Intensität und Vilschichtigkeit des Leisen geprägt’

Süddeutsche Zeitung (Wolfgang Schreiber), August 2008

OLICANTUS

‘Mit einer einzigen, dafür aber gewichtigen, auch noch im Nachhinein fesselnden Ausnahme, den drei Stücken George Benjamins: Olicantus, eine Art lyrisches Intermezzo, das einen nachdenklich fragenden Ton durchhält und mehr nach Kammermusik als nach Musik für ein Kammerorchester klingt...[Viola, Viola] Nun gelingt ein kleines Wunder.’

Süddeutsche Zeitung (Werner Burkhardt), 6 September 2004

PALIMPSESTS

‘Beide Orchesterstücke betonen den Charakter einzelner Instrumente und Klangfarben, auch beziehen sich beide auf ein altes ‘Lied’ wenn es auch fast nur erahnt und oft krass gestört wird, wie zerkratzt wirkt. Benjamin sprach als sein eigener Interpret den Rhythmen wieder unverhofft beschwingende Kraft zu. Der Titel Palimpsest verweist auf abgewischte und überschriebene Pergamente, auf denen der alte Text und auch die Kratzspuren nicht ganz getilgt sind.’

Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger (Marjanne Kierspel), 10 March 2003

‘Eine eindrucksvolle Komposition, die besonders in zweiten Teil mit enormen Aufwand der bemerkenswert spielenden Perkussionisten arbeitete.’

Kölnische Rundschau (Felicita Zink), 13 March 2003

‘Mit einer Brillanz der Veränderung, mit einer Souveränität der Irregulären’

Süddeutsche Zeitung (Guido Fischer), 11 March 2003

‘Er dirigierte seine Palimpsests, einen Zweiteiler von 20 minütiger Dauer, ein energisches, intelligentes, zündendes Stück...Danach haute Benjamin nachdrücklich auf den musikalischen Putz, fischte mit seinen Palimpsests nicht im Reich des Flüsterns, sondern artikulierte hart und eindrucksvoll seine Gedanken, die auf starke Resonanz stießen.’

Berliner Morgenpost, 11 May 2005

‘Nur zu gern suchen die Stars des Klassikbetriebs nach einsamer Größe und finden dabei oft nur große Einsamkeit. George Benjamin zeigt mit seinem Abschiedskonzert als composer in residence beim DSO, wie groß die klingende Summe eines mit Übersicht und Abenteuerlust gestalteten Programms sein kann. Den sanften Briten und das DSO verbindet in der Philharmonie ein feiner Sinn für intellektuell kontrolliertes und dabei klangsinnlich waches Musizieren...In Benjamin’s Palimpsests überlagern sich die vorangegangenen Höreindrücke effektiv: dunkle Linien und perkussive Schlaglichter.’

Der Tagespiegel (Ulrich Amling), 8 May 2005

PURCELL: FANTAZIA 7

‘Die Fantazia wurde nämlich in einer Bearbeitung George Benjamins aufgeführt, und plötzlich klang sie vollkommen ungewohnt: fremd,

zerfetzt und zerfasert. Ein wunderbarer Beleg im übrigen für Purcells Modernität.’

Die Welt (Stephan Hoffmann), 22 March 1996

RINGED BY THE FLAT HORIZON

‘Aber auch George Benjamin hörte sich nach seinem Eliot-Tonpoem lautstark ausgezeichnet. Es ist doch immer wieder überraschend, in wie jungen Jahren sich das künftige musikalische Großtalent Bahn bricht, vorzugsweise mit kleinen Naturkatastrophen wie diesen, die Benjamin heraufbeschwört und immer erneut vom Solo-Cello beschwichtigen läßt.’

Berliner Morgenpost (Klaus Geitel), 7 May 2006

‘George Benjamin selbst etwa schrieb als 19-jähriger ein Stück mit dem Titel Ringed by the Flat Horizon, dessen Verlauf geradezu labyrinthisch ist. Was als sparsames Spiel über einige Orchesterklänge beginnt, scheint sich zur Mitte hin in ein Cello-Konzert zu verwandeln, um wieder in eine Reminiszenz des Genus zu münden. So gerät man immer wieder in Episoden, die abgeschlossen scheinen; folgt man ihnen, verirrt man sich, und die Höhepunkte donnern unerwartet über einen hinweg. Tatsächlich aber ihrer Folge eine kalkulierte Dramaturgie zu Grunde. Dass Benjamin nach der Uraufführung dieser Partitur als der vielversprechendste britische Komponist seiner Generation galt, ist immer noch verständlich.’

Berliner Zeitung (Peter Uehling), 8 May 2006

SHADOWLINES

‘...der zart-präzisen Kanons in George Benjamin’s wunderbarem Klavierstück Shadowlines.’

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 20 November 2003

‘...der zart-präzisen Kanons in George Benjamin’s wunderbarem Klavierstück Shadowlines.’

SOMETIME VOICES

‘Dietrich Henschel, als indisponiert entschuldigt, singt die Baritonpartie mit höchstem Schneid. Er klinkt sich nachhaltig in das hellstimmige instrumentale Geflirr ein: diese von Benjamin heraufbeschworene reich orchestrierte Traumwelt, die um die Solostimme zu kreisen scheint.’

Berliner Morgenpost, 15 February 2005

VIOLA, VIOLA

‘Schließe die Augen, und du hörst ein ganzes Orchester, war Benjamins Kompositionsdevise, ähnlich einem barocken Trompe-l’œil-Maler, der den Betrachter an einen bestimmten Punkt stellt, von wo aus die tatsächlich flache, bemalte Decke aussieht wie eine Kuppel. Mit Klangpartikeln, die wie Zahnräder ineinander griffen, webte Benjamin also ein Band, in dem sich die Schwingungseigenschaften so manchen Orchesterinstruments wiederfinden sollten, von der Harfe bis zur Posaune.’

Frankfurter Rundschau (Bernhard Uske), 24 February 2000

ITALY

PALIMPSESTS

‘...è musica nuova, creativa, che parla un linguaggio non convenzionale, musica che si affida a sensazioni ... L’originalità di Benjamin si fa sentire negli sprazzi vitali di ottoni e percussioni, con incastri e soluzioni ritmiche interessanti.’

L’Unione Sarda (Greca Piras), 22 April 2000

SUDDEN TIME

‘... mostrano una mano straordinaria nell’uso della grande orchestra.’

La Stampa, 29 September 1995

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

‘...confermano il talento di questo musicista nato nel 1960: muove da Messiaen, ma ha una eleganza e una serratezza tutta sua, e perviene a una specie di drammaticità timbrica di grande presa ...’

La Stampa, Giorgio Pestelli, 10 October 1996

THE NETHERLANDS

AT FIRST LIGHT

‘The culminating point of the evening was - without doubt - At First Light by George Benjamin, the greatest British talent for a very long time. The refinement of colours with which this composer bore witness, when he was only 22, verges on the unbelievable.’

Het Parool (Erik Voermans, trans. Jaco Mijner), March 1992

INTO THE LITTLE HILL

‘Monteverdi pats on the shoulder, Gluck sends his compliments and even Wagner won’t be too Anglophobe to mumble ‘well done’. As opera innovators they know the pitfalls of music theatre. And they will recognise how the Brit George Benjamin goes back to basics in Into the Little Hill, this exquisite performance that the Holland Festival invited to Amsterdam...

With Into the Little Hill George Benjamin touches upon the century-old music theatre question of what leads: music or text? There are composers – see above – that (paradoxically) turn to the text. To then wrap it in music that strikes the target all the more efficiently. The power of notes and words also makes for the essence of Into the Little Hill, a lyric tale for two voices and a 15-strong ensemble, modelled after the fairytale of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. In all its conciseness it deals with the seductive power of music (all rats coming from their holes), the breaking of promises (the destroyer gets turned down) and the revenge of the hurt (say goodbye to your kids). George Benjamin and his librettist Martin Crimp add a contemporary dimension: politicians with macho talks and an undecided electorate.

...It would surprise us if this did not become a contemporary classic.’

Volkskrant (Guido van Oorschot), June 2007

...It would surprise us if this did not become a contemporary classic.’

‘Benjamin let himself get carried away by the sublime libretto by Martin Crimp, and composed unearthly beautiful and profound music. This piece is a marvel of economical theatricality, superiorly orchestrated for Ensemble Modern, who were at their best this Saturday under Frank Ollu. Only two singers enact the story in a Brecht-like manner. Contralto Hilary Summers and soprano Anu Komsí did this admirably. With ominous lighting, an orchestra pit full of wood shavings and two lit boards a sinister world is evoked. It’s over before you know it. A pity, but even one extra note would destroy this little masterpiece... Into the Little Hill is like a light little feather, whirling down, that hits the earth to leave a crater.’

Trouw (Peter van der Lint), 18 June 2007

PALIMPSESTS

‘Diezelfde kwalificaties golden voor zijn eigen orkestwerk Palimpsests, zij het dat hij een veel hermetischer idioom hanteert dan geniale Fransman, waardoor je als luisteraar bij een eerste kennismaking niet veel verder komt dan een globale indruk. Die was niet ongunstig, omdat er alleen aan Benjamins vakmanschap en coloristisch vermogen al veel te genieten valt, maar bevredigend was het niet. Je zou zo’n stuk eigenlijk twee keer achter elkaar willen horen, met uitgebreide uitleg van de componist.’

Parool (Erik Voermans), 27 October 2006

‘In Palimpsests werkt Benjamin met een avontuurlijke orkestopstellingen: geen celli, maar wel twee keer vier contrabassen aan weerskanten. Er klinkt veel robuust koper, maar er is toch ook weer ruimte voor verfijnde harp en celestaklanken. en soms klinken zelfs een soort ‘vogelgeluidjes’ vanuit de eerste violen’

Trouw (Kees Arntzen), 28 October 2006

‘Dezelfde transparante stapeling brengt George Benjamin aan in zijn eigen composite Palimpsest. Vooral het eerste deel, dat door het Concertgebouw eerder is uitgevoerd, wekt bij de luisteraar een permanent sinterklaarsgevoel: kleurige surprises volgen elkaar op, van geheimzinnige brushes op trommelvel tot orgelend koper en kakelende piccolo’s. Even creatief als intelligent kanaliseert Benjamin zijn verbluffende klankvoorstellende vermogens.’

Volkskrant (Guido van Oorschot), 28 October 2006

SUDDEN TIME

‘...a brilliant fantasy ...capricious and fascinating.’

Haagsehe Courant, 23 March 1996

THREE INVENTIONS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

‘Three Inventions is an incredibly well-crafted piece, perfectly orchestrated, indeed rich in invention which, above all, possesses an immaculate sense of theatrical tension. Benjamin understands the art of making music that is immediate yet, at the same time, unbelievably clever, complex and sophisticated.’

De Telegraaf, June 1996

SPAIN

A MIND OF WINTER

‘...uno de los creadores mas celebrados, originales y refrescantes de la musica contemporanea britanica ...’

Manuel I Ferrand (ABC de Sevilla), 4 May 1996

INTO THE LITTLE HILL

‘...Into the Little Hill del Británico discípulo de Messiaen George Benjamin (1960), teatro musical para dos voces y conjunto instrumental (en este caso el Ensemble Modern dirigido por Benjamin). Un tratamiento musical ejemplar de palabra que central la obra. Discurso sutil, bien estructurado y poético, de estupenda instrumentación (color y timbrica). Un festival, el de Lucerna, que aún distinción con alto nivel de calidad y propuestas nuevas.’

La Vanguardia (Jorge de Persia), 26 August 2008

RINGED BY THE FLAT HORIZON

‘(Ringed by the Flat Horizon) Intense and disturbing music...a great work from a composer who amasses inherited knowledge and shows, in turn, his own genius.’

El País (Luis Suñén), 28 November 2005

SOMETIME VOICES

‘The two scores of Benjamin (Sometime Voices & Palimpsests) are equally masterly...one of the greatest musicians of our time...’

El País (Luis Suñén), 5 December 2005

‘In Sometime Voices, Benjamin galvanized his interpreters, reaching moments of rare plenitude and expressive strength.’

La Vanguardia (Benet Casablancas), 5 December 2005

SWITZERLAND

AT FIRST LIGHT

‘Diese vertonte Benjamin Sinngemäss mit At First Light, ein klangintensives Gemälde mit Tiefenwirkung. Eher düster zeichnet sich dennoch die Grundstimmung, und sie schliesst eine gewisse Brachialität nicht aus.’

Neue Luzerner Zeitung (David Koch), 19 August 2008

DUET

‘Faszinierend, wie er in den tiefen Registern des Klaviers bleibt, das hier lange nachschwingt und ungewöhnliche, schillernde Klangfarbenkombinationen elngeht. Wunderbar auch das Zwiesgespräch mit der Harfe und den Bass-Pizzicati im Hintergrund. Doch trotz solch klangmagischer Momente verliert Benjamin nie die genau durchgehörte Struktur, den Faden, der das Klavier im zweiten Teil mit virtuellen Läufen in den oberen Registern, unterstützt vom Celesta, zum Abschluss führt.’

Beilage Basler Zeitung (Verena Naegele), 1 September 2008

So Sparsam der Aufwand und kurz das Stück, so reich das Spektrum der Klangfarben, die auch von den Orchestermusikern nur kurz angeschlagen oder gezupft werden, während das Klavier (Pierre-Laurent Aimard) ganz eigene Wege geht.

Luzerner Zeitung, 1 September 2008

‘Inizia con un assolo tecnicamente difficile del pianoforte, che in seguito tacerà poco ma avrà anche ruoli subordinati in un tessuto denso, variato nel ritmo, negli accostamenti timbrici. C’è un duetto per pianoforte e tromboni, si sentono i flautati dei contrabbassi nel registro acuto, il suono penetrante di una tromba con sordina, i rintocchi luminosi di celesta e marimba, i pizzicati delicati del l’arpa che seguono come ombre il pianoforte.

Il carattere astratto della musica in Benjamin è ancorato alla natura materica del suono. Egli si dichiara un ossesso dell’armonia e della sua percezione. Nel comporre rifiuta di seguire forme, schemi precostituiti, che teme conculchino la spontaneità. È evidentemente lontano dal minimalismo e dal serialismo e assicura di non saper scrivere una musica nella quale non sente l’armonia e non può giudicare se le note sono al punto giusto oppure no. In questa ricerca della giusta posizione delle note e dei timbri si consuma la sua energia creativa, la sua ispirazione, come un fuoco lento, egli ammette, raramente come una gran fiammata. E ricorda anche che il compositore scrive quello che può, non sempre quello che desidera.’

La Regione Ticino (Enrico Colombo), 2 September 2008

‘...Die Antwort anthält viele eben falls sosrt verklingende Pizzicati, Harfentöne, Schlagwerkklänge, also viel Klavierähnliches - und setzt starke Gegenpole dazu. So führt Duet durch ganz unterschiedliche Klangzimmer, die wegen des Verzichts auf Violinen oft dunkel, aber nie düster wirken. Getrennt sind sie eher durch Vorhänge als durch Türen: Man hört stets und manchmal fast zu sehr, woher man gekommen ist und wohin etwas führt.

Pierre-Laurent Aimard, für den Benjamin das Werk geschrieben hat, spielte das Klavierpart mit der ihm eigenen energischen Sachlichkeit. Und dann war das Cleveland Orchestra, das Zusammen mit dem Lucerne Festival, der Carnegie Hall und Roche diesen Kompositionsauftrag vergeben hatte - und sich als ideales Orchester für diese Musik profilierte.’

Tages Anzeiger, 2 September 2008

‘Zu hören was Duet, ein Werk des Engländers George Benjamin für Klavier und Orchester. Das Soloinstrument treibt, von Pierre-Laurent Aimard in kristalliner Klarheit gesaltet, in schillernden Klanggeweben und Einzeltönen ein dichtes, aber auch ein wenig kühles Spiel.’

Der Landbote (Herbert Büttiker), 2 September 2008

‘Das knapp viertelstündige Klavierkonzert wusste durch die Ökonomie der Mittel und das klangliche Raffinement zu fesseln.’

Reue Zürcher Zeitung (Martina Wohlthat), 3 September 2008

INTO THE LITTLE HILL

‘Into the Little Hill, durch den Dramatiker Martin Crimp für den Komponisten eingerichtet, erzählt die Geschichte vom «Rattenfänger von Hameln», der mit seiner Musik eine Stadt von einer Rattenplage befreit, um den versprochenen Lohn geprellt wird und Rache nimmt, indem er mit den Kindern der Stadt verfährt, wie er mit den Ratten verfahren ist. «Erzählt» ist richtig, denn bei Into the Little Hill handelt es sich um narratives Musiktheater, allerdings um eines in gebrochener Form. Nicht nur ist der Erzählvorgang selbst Teil des Geschehens, die Figuren werden auch allesamt von zwei (phänomenalen) Sängerinnen dargestellt, der Sopranistin Anu Komsu und der Altistin Hilary Summers. Und auch eine Szene gibt es nicht, die Musik selbst bildet die Bühne, indem auf einem durch Holzschnitzel gebildeten, durch zwei helle Laufstege geteilten Halbrund das Ensemble Modern in kleiner Besetzung verteilt ist.

Sehr attraktiv nimmt sich die von Daniel Jeanneteau geschaffene Konstellation aus, und unter der Leitung von Franck Ollu kommt die verdichtete und zugleich äusserst fassliche Musik von George Benjamin zu bester Wirkung.’

Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Peter Hagmann), 10 June 2008

‘Der Rattenfänger hat zwar schon das musikalische Wunderkind beschäftigt, aber erst jetzt ist – dank der Bekanntschaft mit dem Dramatiker Martin Crimp – Benjamins erstes Werk für das Musiktheater entstanden. Es ist alles andere als ein pittoreskes Kinderstück.

Formal bricht es mit der traditionellen Spielform; die Geschichte wird von einem Sopran und Mezzosopran zugleich erzählt und gespielt. Der Minister, seine Frau und ihr beider Kind, dann der «Stranger» (der Rattenfänger) und auch die Menge, die vom eigentlich liberalen respektive nur an seine Macht denkenden Politiker die Ausrottung der Ratten verlangt, wird von den beiden Sängerinnen gestaltet. Der Dialog ist in dieser Dramatik nicht der Normal-, sondern der Grenzfall, die direkte Rede wird oft Zusammen mit der Ankündigung rezitiert.’

Der Landbote (Herbert Büttiker), 25 August 2008

‘Die Verführungskraft der Musik selbst war das Thema von George Benjamins Oper Into the little Hill. Klanglich eingelöst wurde sie im Luzerner Theater, wo ein Fremder einem Politiker versprach, die Rattenplage durch die Zauberkraft der Musik zu lösen. Da putschte zwar das Ensemble Modern den suggestiven Erzählton von Hilary Summers und den quirligen Sopran von Anu Komsu zu gellender Ausdruckskraft hoch. Aber solche Drastik macht in neuer Musik den Wohlklang umso wirkungsvoller und glaubhafter. Die wie aus Tropfsteinhöhlen blubbernden Klänge, mit denen Benjamin die Kraft der Musik beschwört, liess ihr zudem das Geheimnis, das Schönheit immer umgibt. Der Moderne-Marathon bewies, dass das bei Zeitgenossen nicht anders ist als bei Chopin.’

Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Mat Hinweis), 26 August 2008

‘Dass das sechswöchige Festival auch auf dem Gebiet des experimentellen Musiktheaters aktiv ist, zeigen nicht nur die Aufführung von George Benjamins Into the Little Hill unter der Leitung des Komponisten oder die spartenübergreifenden Projekte Joachim Schlömers in diesem Jahr, sondern die Pläne für eine „Salle Modulable“ in naher Zukunft. Intendant Michael Haefliger fehlt bislang ein „wirklich guter Raum für die Realisierung innovativer szenischer Konzepte“. Bis 2013 soll der Wunsch, der ans ehemalige Stuttgarter Forum Neues Musiktheater erinnert, erfüllt sein.’

Esslinger Zeitung (Von Dietholf Zerweck), 30 August 2008

THREE INVENTIONS

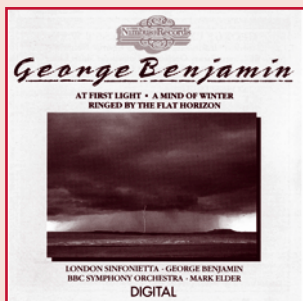
‘... In seinen Three Inventions (1993-95) zahlt gestillter Hunger nach purem Notenquantum sich aus: Dies sind auch Klangbilder, sie zitieren aber nicht bloss herbei, sondern bemächtigen sich des Klangkörpers wirklich. Materialien, Kontraste werden nicht einfach aufgestellt, sondern in ihrer Konsequenz bedacht und entwickelt. Eine sehr originelle Partitur, die mit einfachen Mitteln grosse Wirkung erzeugt und für die erste peinvolle Stunde entschädigte.’

Basler Zeitung, 19 November 2001

‘George Benjamin a l’art de tisser des textures aux étoffes contrastées, aussi rêches que souples. Lumineuse, chatoyante, éruptive comme un volcan, sa musique prend une coloration plus tragique lorsqu’il entame Three Inventions... La dernière pièce – extraordinaire – mêle le sérieux au caustique. L’ombre de Mahler plane derrière ces sonorités fugaces de fête foraine, derrière cette marche implacable qui mène à l’échafaud.’

Le Temps (Geneva) (Julian Sykes), 6 October 2005

DISCOGRAPHY



AT FIRST LIGHT; A MIND OF WINTER; RINGED BY THE FLAT HORIZON

London Sinfonietta/BBC SO/Penelope Walmsley-Clarke/George Benjamin/Mark Elder
Winner of the 1987 Koussevitsky International Critics Award and a Grand Prix du Disque
Nimbus CD NI 5075 (1987)

'I predict this will become a collector's item, since the three works recorded here represent the first flowering of George Benjamin's prodigious talent ... An indispensable disc which deserves investigation by the inquisitive collector, and not merely by contemporary specialists.'

Hi-Fi News & Record Review (Hugh Canning), November 1987



ANTARA

London Sinfonietta/George Benjamin
Winner of the 1990 Gramophone Contemporary Record of the Year Award
Nimbus NI 5167 (1989)

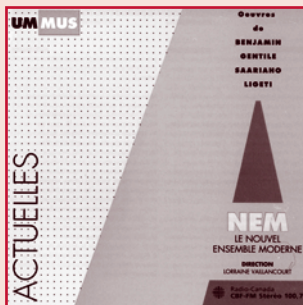
'Antara is among the most seamless of unions of electronic-acoustic musicmaking I've heard, and it's exciting. Benjamin seems to be in absolute command of his resources,

which he aims in this work at the heart, head and gut in equal measure and with equal success.'

Fanfare (Mike Silvertown), January/February 1990

There is no recourse to naïve contrasts between exotic sound effects and print-outs from the electro-acoustic numbers game, but rather an evident relish for the potential revealed when instruments and computers interact ...

Gramophone, October 1989



AT FIRST LIGHT
ACTUELLES – LE NOUVEL ENSEMBLE MODERNE
Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne/Lorraine Vaillancourt
UM MUS (1990)



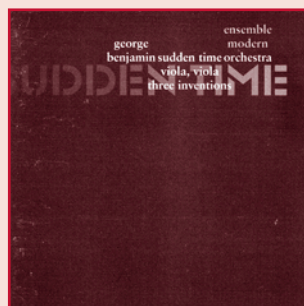
AT FIRST LIGHT

Tokyo Sinfonietta/Kunitaka Kokaji
(Live recording at Tokyo Bunkaikan 9.11.94)
Tokyo Sinfonietta label: TS95001
(1994)



THREE INVENTIONS/UPON SILENCE/SUDDEN TIME/OCTET

Susan Bickley/Fretwork/London Sinfonietta/London Philharmonic Orchestra
Nimbus NI 5505 (1997)



SUDDEN TIME/VIOLA, VIOLA/THREE INVENTIONS

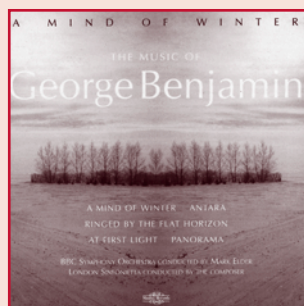
Ensemble Modern/George Benjamin
Ensemble Modern Medien
EMCD-002 (2000)

'...this recording is a delight.'

International record review
(Christopher Ballantine), November 2001

'... the seamless flow and faultless plotting of Benjamin's writing emerges more forcefully than ever.'

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 18 May 2001



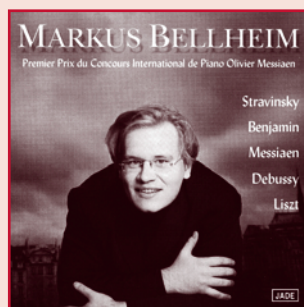
A MIND OF WINTER – THE MUSIC OF GEORGE BENJAMIN

(A MIND OF WINTER; AT FIRST LIGHT; RINGED BY THE FLAT HORIZON*; ANTARA; PANORAMA)

London Sinfonietta/BBC SO/Penelope Walmsley-Clarke/George Benjamin/Mark Elder*
Nimbus NI 5643 (2000)

'... an essential document of the music of our time.'

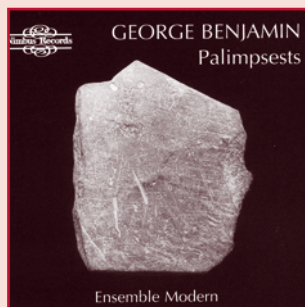
Gramophone (Arnold Whittall), June 2000



MARKUS BELLHEIM
(FEATURING 'SORTILÈGES')
(premiere recording) Markus Bellheim
Jade 198 775-2 (2002)



VIOLA SPACE
(FEATURING 'VIOLA, VIOLA')
Imai/Kawasaki/Tanamura and friends
BIS CD-1379/1380
Digital (2003)



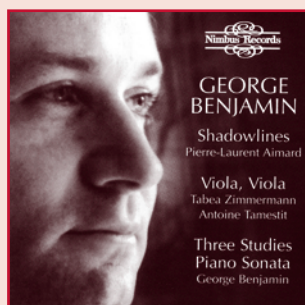
PALIMPESTS/
(PALIMPESTS/AT FIRST
LIGHT/SUDDEN
TIME/OLICANTUS)
Ensemble Modern/George
Benjamin/Oliver Knussen
Nimbus NI 5732 (2004)
*'I have heard many CDs that
conjure up strange sounds from
the orchestra, but none more
brilliantly and poetically than this*

*one... Benjamin's feeling for form is as original as his ear, and
leads to all sorts of unexpected twists and turns. This is music
that lives on its nerves, and it needs performances of a similar
edge-of-the-seat tension to come off, as well as a loving attention
to the subtlety of the sound... this is an album that deserves
greater attention.'*

The Times (Ivan Hewett), 4 December 2004

*'These two new discs all but round out Nimbus's coverage of
George Benjamin's published works to date. Complementary in
terms of musical forces represented, they confirm the steady
evolutionary thread running through the composer's output –
one with no extraneous or superfluous pieces, in line with an
aesthetic that seeks fresh creative options at every stage.'*

International Record Review (Graham Simpson), December 2004

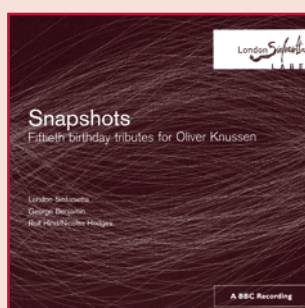


**SHADOWLINES/VIOLA
VIOLA/THREE STUDIES/
PIANO SONATA**
Pierre-Laurent Aimard/Tabea
Zimmermann/Antoine
Tamestit/George Benjamin
Nimbus NI 5713

*For a composer still in his teens,
the Sonata shows an astonishing
surefootedness, almost a swagger;*

*it's never derivative, just full of vivid ideas rampaging across the
keyboard and showing a minute understanding of the
instrument's textural possibilities... [Viola, Viola] a compositional
tour de force which welds the two violas into a single
megainstrument with superhuman range and expressive
capabilities.'*

BBC Music Magazine (Andrew Clements), October 2004



OLICANTUS
London Sinfonietta/George Benjamin
London Sinfonietta label
SINF CD1-2004 (2004)



OLICANTUS
Orchestra de la Monnaie/
Kazushi Ono
Warner Classics 2564602442 (2005)

*'Benjamin's small but perfectly
formed Olicantus provides a
delightful pendant.'*

**International Record Review
(David Gutman), April 2005**



HOMMAGE À MESSIAEN
(FEATURING 'SORTILÈGES')
Prodromos Symeonidis
Telos music records
TLS 107 (2008)



ALTITUDE
Foden's Richardson Band/Bramwell
Tovey
NMC D142 (2008)



**INTO THE LITTLE
HILL/SOMETIME
VOICES/DANCE FIGURES**

Anu Komsí/Hilary Summers/
Ensemble Modern/Frank
Ollu/BBCSO/Oliver Knussen and
DSO/Dietrich Henschel/Kent Nagano
Nimbus NI 5828 (2008)
Winner of the Diapason D'Or award
March 2009

*'[Into the Little Hill] is an exquisite piece, full of beguiling
sounds, and retains all that magic in this recording, with the
original pair of soloists, Anu Komsí and Hilary Summers.
The remainder of the disc updates Nimbus's long-standing
commitment to Benjamin's music by including two previously
unrecorded works... all in all, this is a remarkable disc.'*

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 22 August 2008

'...this is a remarkable disc.'

*'This CD gives an excellent overview of the new Benjamin, in
superb sound and performances. The centrepiece is his 2006
opera Into the Little Hill, a retelling of the Pied Piper legend as a
dark political allegory. The savage opening is a shock, the two
singers Anu Komsí and Hilary Summers hurling out the words
'Kill them, they bite' (referring not just to rats but to Undesirables
in general). Thereafter the music lives mostly in a twilight realm of
dark sonorities and whispered encounters, riven occasionally by
sudden loud shocks. The two singers switch between their many
roles with great dramatic flair, and the Ensemble Modern under
Franck Ollu gives the score just the right dangerous beauty, like a
cat waiting to pounce.'*

BBC Music Magazine (Ivan Hewett), October 2008



**PIERRE-LAURENT AIMARD:
NOT JUST ONE TRUTH (DVD)**
(FEATURING 'SHADOWLINES')
Pierre-Laurent Aimard
B001JCZY7M

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