OLIVER KNUSSEN

CATALOGUE OF WORKS

‘Music of crystalline concision, complexity, and richness’

TOM SERVICE, THE GUARDIAN

FABER MUSIC
Oliver Knussen was a towering figure in contemporary music, as composer and conductor, teacher and artistic director. The relatively small size of his compositional output conceals music of exceptional refinement and subtlety – few bars of Knussen may have more impact than whole movements by lesser composers. Besides definitive interpretations of his own music he must surely have given more first performances than any other conductor, alongside an outstanding body of recordings. He was the central focus of so many activities, and an irreplaceable mentor to his fellow composers, who constantly sought and relied on his advice and encouragement.

He was born in Glasgow; his father Stuart Knussen was principal double bass of the London Symphony Orchestra for nearly 20 years. Although he would have laughed at any idea of his being a child prodigy this gave him an unrivalled insight into the workings of the orchestra from an early age. It culminated in his conducting his First Symphony with the LSO at the age of 15, when their principal conductor István Kertész fell ill. His father played in the first performance of Benjamin Britten’s church parable Curlew River in 1964. Knussen attended all the rehearsals, and Britten was very encouraging to the young composer, commissioning a work for the 1969 Aldeburgh Festival.

Between 1963 and 1969 he studied with the composer John Lambert, which gave him a solid but untraditional grounding. His musical perspectives were expanded greatly by studying with Gunther Schuller from 1970 until 1973 at the Tanglewood Music Center, where he met his wife Sue, then a horn player, later a maker of documentary films. This period saw him writing with ever greater confidence – a Concerto for Orchestra commissioned by André Previn in 1969, and his Second Symphony, commissioned by Yehudi Menuhin in 1970 – the latter the first major work in which he felt fully confident of his abilities. Even at the age of 18 his musical personality seemed fully formed.

The 1970s were a period of intense creativity for Knussen, with chamber works including Rosary Songs, Océan de Terre, and Ophelia Dances, culminating in the completion in 1979 of his Third Symphony, a work whose first movement had been conducted by its dedicatee, Michael Tilson Thomas in 1973. But this activity came at a cost: his extreme scrupulousness led him to take increasing care in composing, whether the work was on a small or large scale, and the material for the first complete performance of the symphony at the Proms was only delivered at the last minute. The 1970s also saw the beginning of his longstanding relationship with Faber Music.

The major works of his middle years were the two ‘fantasy operas’ he wrote in collaboration with Maurice Sendak, Where the Wild Things Are (1979-83) and Higglety Pigglety Pop! (1984-85). These superbly crafted, colourful works give every impression of unaffected spontaneity, but for Knussen it was a meticulous and painstaking process before he could be satisfied with them. Both operas were first performed incomplete, while the final version of Higglety was only arrived at to the composer’s satisfaction in 1999.

Until the 1980s conducting had been a second string for Knussen, but it gradually began to take up more of his time, particularly with his appointments as Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival from 1983-98 and Head of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood between 1986 and 1993. In 1992 he and I founded the Aldeburgh Contemporary Composition Course, where it gave him great pleasure to work with young composers and performers, who gratefully sat at his feet. Conducting was an occupation which gave him much satisfaction, with the opportunity to programme the music of both senior and junior composers, as well as his contemporaries, but it inevitably distracted him from composing. ‘I certainly wish I could afford to keep the two roles, conducting and composing, in better balance’ he said in an interview in 2012.

Most of the works from the next decade were on a smaller scale, but the Whitman Settings (1991), Songs without Voices (1991-92) and Horn Concerto (1994) stand out as major achievements. He seemed to recover something of the flair of the 1970s when he composed Prayer Bell Sketch in three days in 1997 in memory of his great friend the composer Toru Takemitsu; the Violin Concerto, composed in 2002 for Pinchas Zukerman, seemed to come almost out of the blue.
The similar intensity of Requiem: Songs for Sue (2005–6) was his considered reaction to the death of his wife in 2003 (he had much earlier composed Sonya’s Lullaby for the birth of their daughter, now a gifted singer, in 1977). He described this major late work succinctly: ‘It’s not a huge work… but it’s a big piece emotionally’. However other works from this period remained incomplete, including the remarkable Cleveland Pictures for orchestra begun in 2003, withdrawn for revision and still unperformed, and concertos for piano and cello. His last completed work was O Hototogisu! for soprano, flute and large ensemble, a tantalising but substantial fragment of an intended larger piece.

Honours came to him in later years – a CBE, and Honorary Membership of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1994, the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Honorary Membership in 2002 and Conductor Award in 2010, the Ivor Novello Classical Music Award and the Queen’s Medal for Music, both in 2016. He had a close association with the London Sinfonietta from the late 1970s onwards, and was their Music Director from 1988 until 2002. He became Associate Guest Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1989 and was their Artist in Association, 2009–12; was Artist in Association with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group from 2006; and Associate Artist of the Southbank Centre in 2006. From 2014 he was Richard Rodney Bennett Professor of Music at the Royal Academy and was awarded an honorary doctorate there shortly before his death.

But in spite of these significant roles, any sense of Olly (as everyone knew him) belonging to the establishment would be an illusion. He was too big a figure to fit into any easily defined category. He had a voracious appetite for knowledge, with a special love for films – he was a Hitchcock obsessive and became friends with Jim Jarmusch – and painting: he had a fascination for obscure artists such as Joachim Patinir and Ivan Bilibin. But above all his consuming passion was for music. There was hardly any composer into whom he could not offer insights, although his taste was very much for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was a love that could and did get in the way of composing: it was as if every bar that he wrote was measured against all the music that he knew, and this explains the almost painfully slow process by which his music was written, and the number of fragments left behind.

He had close friendships with most of the major twentieth century composers – Takemitsu, Hans Werner Henze, Elliott Carter (whose late works he championed), Mauricio Kagel, Harrison Birtwistle and Alexander Goehr among many others. He even established a relationship with Karlheinz Stockhausen, and loved to tell the story of how, when he said to him ‘You can call me Olly’, the reply came back ‘You can call me Stockhausen’.

Although he leaves a wonderful legacy of performance it is primarily as a composer that he would want to be remembered. It makes it all the more regrettable that, although he gave less time to conducting due to the ill health which dogged his last years, it did not mean – as he said to me in hope only a couple of months before he died – that he would have time to write the music that was in his head, and which would undoubtedly have taken him in new and rewarding directions.

Colin Matthews
Higglety Pigglety Pop! and Where the Wild Things Are

‘Timeless classics… There are differences between these scores, but what they share is a playfully allusive wit and a bright translucence as the musical ideas morph intricately: Knussen’s highly-coloured sound-world is an invigorating place to be.’

The Independent (Michael Church), 11 June 2012

‘A delight, with gorgeously sensual and richly textured music embodying a plot that illustrates the need that infants have for imaginative freedom as well as domestic security.’

The Daily Telegraph (Rupert Christiansen), 11 June 2012

‘What emerges so forcefully in hearing these one-acters again is the formal elegance of both works – Wild Things is a through-composed work; the more varied, psychologically complex Higglety a number opera divided into set-piece arias and ensembles – and the dazzling imagination of Knussen’s sound world. With its vast range of stylistic references, there is not a note out of place.’

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 10 June 2012

Higglety Pigglety Pop!

‘A miracle of balance, masterly in the ease and flexibility of its dramatic processes, wonderfully characterized, and touching in the emotional discoveries just below the surface.’

The Guardian (Tom Sutcliffe), 7 August 1985

Where the Wild Things Are

‘Perfect… a source of constant surprise and delight, matched by music of a scintillating aptness, colour and variety that haunts the memory.’

The Daily Telegraph (Robert Henderson), 10 January 1984

‘The score glitters with wit, beauty, romantic fantasy, and operatic objet trouvés rendered marvellously fresh; the stagecraft behind the whole thing reveals Knussen as a born theatre composer.’

Opera (Max Lopper), March 1984

‘The musical language, while often gritty and thick-textured, abounds in energy, atmosphere, alluring sounds and visceral drama.’

The New York Times (Anthony Tommasini), 11 April 2011

or There Must be More to Life

fantasy opera in one act (nine scenes) for soloists and orchestra
60 minutes

Libretto (Eng): Maurice Sendak and Oliver Knussen after the book by Sendak
Singers: Jennie (MS)/Potted Plant/Baby/Mother Goose (S)/Rhoda/voice of Baby’s Mother (S)/Cat-Milkman/high voice of Ash Tree (T)/Pig-In-Sandwich-Boards/low voice of Ash Tree (BBar)


Commissioned by the BBC for Glyndebourne
FP: (preliminary version) 5.8.85 Glyndebourne Festival Opera, UK: London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen/dir. Frank Corsaro
FP: (final version) 3.2.91, Barbican Centre, London, UK: London Symphony Orchestra/Oliver Knussen

Libretto 0-571-51933-4 and full score 0-571-52957-7 on sale, vocal score and parts for hire

Where the Wild Things Are Op.20 (1979-83)

fantasy opera in one act (nine scenes) for soloists and orchestra
40 minutes

Libretto (Eng): Maurice Sendak and Oliver Knussen after the book by Sendak
Singers: Max (S)/Mama (MS)/Tzippy (MS)/Wild Thing with Beard (T)/Wild Thing with Horns (Bar)/Rooster Wild Thing (BBar)/Bull Wild Thing (B)


Commissioned by Opéra National, Brussels, on the occasion of UNESCO International Year of the Child
FP: (original version) 28.11.80, Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels, Belgium: Brussels National Opera/Ronald Zollman/dir. Rhoda Levine
FP: (final version) 9.1.84, National Theatre, London, UK: Glyndebourne Opera/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen/dir. Frank Corsaro

Libretto 0-571-51933-4 on sale, full score, vocal score and parts for hire

REVIEWS

Higglety Pigglety Pop!

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Opera (Max Lopper), March 1984

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The New York Times (Anthony Tommasini), 11 April 2011
Choral Op.8 (1970-72)
wind, percussion and basses
10 minutes
4(V=picc).3.ca.4(lll=Encl)cbcl.2.asax.sax.3.sbn – 4342 – perc(3): 2 tam-t/susp.cym/burmese gong/t.bells/2 tam-t/bongos/BD/glsp/3 tlp.bl/BD/2tgl/crat – double basses (1-4)
The four saxophones may be omitted and replaced by four extra horns
FP: (final version) 30.3.75, Carnegie Hall, New York, USA: American Symphony Orchestra/Michael Tilson Thomas
Score and parts for hire
Published by Margun Music Inc, USA – UK rights only with Faber Music

Fanfares for Tanglewood (1986)
13 brass and percussion in three groups
2 minutes
Group A: 3 tpt – perc(1): t.bells/susp.cym
Group B: 2 hn (or Wagner tubas/euphoniums etc.) – 3 trbn – tuba – perc(1): 2 tam-t
Group C: 4 hn – perc(1): t.bells
FP: 2.8.86, Theatre Concert Hall, Tanglewood, USA: Rager Vosin/Fellows of Tanglewood Music Center/Oliver Knussen
Score 0-571-51051-5 on sale, parts for hire

Flourish with Fireworks Op.22 (1988/93)
large orchestra
4 minutes
Commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra for the opening concert of Michael Tilson Thomas’s first season as their principal conductor
FP: 15.9.88, Barbican Hall, London, UK: London Symphony Orchestra/Michael Tilson Thomas
FP: (revised) 25.8.93, Theatre Concert Hall, Tanglewood, USA: Tanglewood Music Center/Oliver Knussen
Score 0-571-51459-6 on sale, parts for hire

Horn Concerto Op.28 (1994)
horn and orchestra
13 minutes
Commissioned by Suntkory Limited for the Suntory International Program for Music Composition in 1994
FP: 7.10.94, Suntory Hall, Tokyo, Japan: Barry Tuckwell/Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra/Oliver Knussen
Score 0-571-51667-X, piano score and horn part 0-571-51824-9 on sale, parts for hire

Music for a Puppet Court Op.11 (1972/83)
puzzle pieces for two chamber orchestras
10 minutes
Commissioned by the Greater London Council for the 1983 South Bank Summer Music Festival
FP: 23.8.83, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, UK: London Sinfonietta/Simon Rattle
Score 0-571-50865-0 on sale, parts for hire

Songs and A Sea Interlude Op.20a (1979-81)
from the opera Where the Wild Things Are
soprano and orchestra
17 minutes
Text (Eng): Maurice Sendak and Oliver Knussen after the book by Sendak
3(lll=picc).1.ca.3(lll=Encl)1.sbn – 4030 – perc(4): vib/2 t.bells/tgl/5 c.bells/3 susp.cym/5 tlp.bl/2 pair clgts/TD/glsp/anvil/sax.cym/mcas/whip/2 BD/2 glsp/spring coil/2 tam-t/tamb/claves/wind machine – pno (4 hands) – harp – strings (min 66444)
FP: 14.2.81, BBC Radio 3: Jane Manning/BBC Symphony Orchestra/Oliver Knussen
Score 0-571-50706-9 on sale, parts for hire

octet
13 minutes
Commissioned by Florida International Festivals Inc.
FP: 1.2.70, Royal Festival Hall, London, UK: London Symphony Orchestra/Oliver Knussen
FP: (revised) 25.3.02, BBC Studio recording, Maida Vale, London, UK: BBC SO/Andrew Davis
Score and parts for hire
Symphony No.2

‘Darkly glinting, expertly tangled, the symphony inviting and unsettling all at once.’

Boston Globe (Matthew Guerrieri), 15 April 2013

‘The scoring is light and the effect is of transience, of fleeting, fragile beauty that always remains just out of reach.’

The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 31 July 2012

‘Every note in this intricate work is tastidiously placed.’

The Independent (Michael Church), 31 July 2012

Symphony No.3

‘The music’s surfaces move with a captivating shimmer and dazzle, but each time you listen you will take a new pass through the work’s musical currents and undercurrents, finding new layers of poetry and technical-expressive alchemy in its crystalline construction.’

The Guardian (Tom Service), 8 July 2014

‘Knussen at 27 is a composer, who with unerring ear and musicianship appears to have synthesised the entire 20th century tradition of virtuoso orchestral writing… Here is that exciting, beautiful and short work which orchestral managers are always telling us they are looking for in order to do their bit for new music.’

The Sunday Telegraph (Bryan Northcott), 9 September 1979

Violin Concerto

‘The finale brims with energy, spinning a virtuosic solo against a precisely shaped orchestral backdrop.’

Boston Globe (Jeremy Eichler), 13 April 2013

‘The high point of the piece is the gorgeously lyrical Aria, in which the soloist soars above a gently syncopated accompaniment…’

Evening Standard (Barry Millington), 15 August 2003

The Way to Castle Yonder

‘A little jewel of a five-minute orchestral piece…’

The Guardian (Edward Greenfield), 17 June 1988

Whitman Settings

‘Every complex accompaniment… was beautifully and precisely judged, with wind and brass chords that seemed to ring with the clarity of bells.’

The Daily Telegraph (Malcolm Hayes), 9 March 1992

Symphony No.2 Op.7 (1970-71)

high soprano and small orchestra

17 minutes

Text (Grr/Eng): Walt Whitman

2222 – 2000 – perc[1]: 4 ant. t.bells ad lib – strings (min 66442)

Commissioned for the Second Windsor Festival

FP: (preliminary version) 3.10.70, Waterloo Chamber, Windsor Castle, UK: Poppy Holden/Menuhin Festival Orchestra/Yehudi Menuhin

FP: (complete) 18.8.71, Tanglewood, USA: Poppy Holden/Berkshire Music Center Orchestra/Gunther Schuller

Score 0-571-50747-6 on sale, parts for hire

Symphony No.3 Op.18 (1973-79)

orchestra

15 minutes

FP: (preliminary version) 15.8.79, BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London, UK: Poppy Holden/Menhuin Festival Orchestra/Yehudi Menuhin

FP: (complete) 15 April 2013, BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London, UK: Poppy Holden/Menuhin Festival Orchestra/Yehudi Menuhin

Score 0-571-50639-9 on sale, parts for hire


violin and orchestra

17 minutes

3.1.ca.2.1.cbsn – 3220 – timp(=ratchet) – perc(2): gtr(=mandolin ad lib) – strings (min 12.10.8.6.6)

Commissioned by the BBC for the 1979 Promenade Concerts

FP: 5.4.02, Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh, USA: Pinchas Zukerman/Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra/Oliver Knussen

Study score 0-571-52360-9 for sale, score and parts for hire


Pot-pourri after the opera Higglety Pigglety Pop! for orchestra

8 minutes

3.1.ca.3.1.cbsn – 4331 – timp – perc(6): 4 ant. t.bells/3 cymbals/tam-t/2 bladder/suscp.cym/2 SD/TD/2 tam-t/2 t.bells/suscp.cym/2 glsp/2 cymbals/tam-t/2 t.bells/suscp.cym/2 vib/t.bells/tam-t/cymbals/tam-t/2 tam-t/2 t.bells/suscp.cym/2

Commissioned by the Amphion Foundation

FP: (preliminary version) 15.6.88, Aldeburgh Festival, Snape Maltings, Snape, UK: English Chamber Orchestra/Steuart Bedford

FP: (revised version) 31.1.91, Barbican Hall, London, UK: London Symphony Orchestra/Michael Tilson Thomas

Work contains the following sections of music from the opera Higglety Pigglety Pop! (a) ‘The Ride to the Big White House’ (b) ‘Kleine Trauermusik’ (c) ‘The Ride to Castle Yonder’

Score 0-571-51443-X on sale, parts for hire

Whitman Settings Op.25a (1991/2)

soprano and orchestra

12 minutes

Text (Eng): Walt Whitman

3.1.ca.2.1.cbsn – 4030 – perc(4): t.bells/suscp.cym/2 glsp/2 t.bells/2 tam-t/2 t.bells/2 suscp.cym/2

Commissioned by the Amphion Foundation

FP: 5.3.92, Barbican Hall, London, UK: Lucy Shelton/BBC Symphony Orchestra/Oliver Knussen

Study score 0-571-51443-X on sale, parts for hire


from the opera Where the Wild Things Are

orchestra

8 minutes

 commissioned by the Amphion Foundation

FP: 21.7.87, BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London, UK: London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen

Score and parts for hire
Coursing Op.17 (1979)
Etude No.1
chamber orchestra of 14 players
6 minutes
(11111)
Commissioned by the London Sinfonietta with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain.
FP: 20 April 1991
Financial Times (Allan Kozinn),
19 April 2013
A tightly constructed work inspired by Shakespeare’s description of Ophelia’s madness, it blends wind, string
and keyboard timbres superbly and moves easily between sprightliness and dreamy introspection.’
Financial Times (Alban Kazan),
20 April 1991
Coursing
‘A brilliant little firecracker…’
Financial Times (David Murray),
19 June 2002
Hums and Songs of Winnie the Pooh
‘Like all Knussen’s music, Hums and Songs is written with a marvellously exact and imaginative ear… it is poised, charming, and amusing: a happy blend of miniature tone poem and tiny song cycle.’
The New Yorker (Andrew Porter),
14 May 1984
O Hototogisu!
‘A birdsong-like flute, festooned with grace notes, frames and punctuates the tiny songs themselves, with their elaborately soaring vocal lines, while the ensemble is used with microscopic precision.’
The Guardian (Andrew Clements),
26 June 2017
‘…Booth’s soprano blossoming in duet with the flautist in the cracked porcelain soundworld of Knussen’s exquisite O Hototogisu!’
The Times (Anna Picard),
20 September 2017
‘Intricately scored… a tight, expressive showcase for soprano and flautist: the vocal part yearning and supplicatory, the instrument brittle and bouncy.’
The Times (Neil Fisher),
26 June 2017
Océan de Terre
‘Sumptuous… clotted with color, dense with incident, yet also transparent in its design.’
Boston Globe (Richard Dyer),
7 August 1991
Ophelia Dances Book 1 Op.13 (1975)
‘The piece really dances… dazzling.’
The New York Times (Anthony Tommasini),
19 April 2013
‘A tightly constructed work inspired by Shakespeare’s description of Ophelia’s madness, it blends wind, string
and keyboard timbres superbly and moves easily between sprightliness and dreamy introspection.’
The New York Times (Alban Kazan),
20 April 1991
Ophelia Dances Book 1
‘The piece really dances… dazzling.’
The New York Times (Anthony Tommasini),
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‘A tightly constructed work inspired by Shakespeare’s description of Ophelia’s madness, it blends wind, string
and keyboard timbres superbly and moves easily between sprightliness and dreamy introspection.’
The New York Times (Alban Kazan),
20 April 1991
Processionals
Excitingly dense, searching, completely uncluttered textures… The two movements, often
suggesting a brittle Bergian style, were quite gripping…’
The Daily Telegraph (P.W.D.),
21 October 1981
Processionals Op.2 (1968/78)
chamber ensemble of nine players
10 minutes
1111 – 1000 – strings (111110)
Recomposition of Pantomime (1968) commissioned by the Melos Ensemble
FP: 15.12.78, Amalfi, Bristol, UK: Lontano/Oliver Knussen
Score 0-571-55570-5 (fp) on sale, parts for hire
soprano and ensemble of 15 players
12 minutes
Commissioned for MusicNOW, the new music chamber series of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra
fl.afl.2 cl.bcl – 2 hn – perc(1): mar/tam-t – pno(=cel) – harp – 2 vla.2 vlc.db
FP: 3.4.06, MusicNOW, Chicago, USA: Claire Booth/Members of Chicago Symphony Orchestra/Oliver Knussen
Score 0-571-53143-1 on sale, parts for hire

four pieces for eight players
11 minutes
fl.ca.cl – hn – pno – vln.vla.vlc
Commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center as part of the Elise L Stoeger Composer’s Chair Award
FP: 26.4.92, Alice Tully Hall, New York, USA: Chamber Music Society of the Lincoln Center/Oliver Knussen
Score 0-571-51350-6 on sale, parts for hire

Two Organa Op.27 (1994-5)
I Notre Dame des Jouets – organum from a music box
large chamber ensemble
2 minutes
2.ca.2.1 – 2110 – perc(2): vib/glsp/mcas/vibraslap – cel/pno – harp – strings (11111)
FP: 7.2.95, Theatre aan de Parade, ’s-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands: Members of Het Brabants Orkest/ Oliver Knussen
Score 0-571-51624-6 on sale, parts for hire

II Organum to honour the 20th anniversary of the Schönberg Ensemble
large chamber ensemble
4 minutes
Written for the Schönberg Ensemble and their director Reinbert de Leeuw to honour the 20th anniversary of the Schönberg Ensemble
Score 0-571-51624-6 on sale, parts for hire

Reflection (1975)
for violin and piano
op. 31a
August – September 2016

for Tamar Halicy-Wagen & Hauk Williams

for Tamar Halicy-Wagen & Hauk Williams

for Tamar Halicy-Wagen & Hauk Williams

for Tamar Halicy-Wagen & Hauk Williams

for Tamar Halicy-Wagen & Hauk Williams

for Tamar Halicy-Wagen & Hauk Williams

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for Tamar Halicy-Wagen & Hauk Williams

for Tamar Halicy-Wagen & Hauk Williams
CHAMBER

…upon one note (1995)
after Henry Purcell
chamber ensemble of four players
3 minutes
c.l.vh.vl.vlc.pno
Score 0-571-51715-3 on sale, parts for hire

Triptych Part 1
violin and piano
7 minutes
Commissioned by Christopher Rowland and Giles Swayne with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain
FP: 10.7.80, St John’s Wood Church, London, UK: Alan McNaught/George Nicholson
Autumnal is the first in a triptych of chamber works comprising of Autumnal Op.14, Sonya’s Lullaby Op.16 and Cantata Op.15. These pieces may be performed together or separately.
Score and part 0-571-50584-8 on sale

Triptych Part 3
oboe and string trio
8 minutes
Commissioned with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain
FP: 17.9.79, National Gallery, Athens ISCM, Greece: Janet Craxton/Nash Ensemble
Study score 0-571-50637-2 on sale, playing score on special sale from the hire library

cor anglais and clarinet
4 minutes
FP: 7.11.91, Concert Hall, Broadcasting House, London, UK: Nicholas Daniel/Joy Farrall
Playing score 0-571-51481-2 on sale

Reflection Op.31a (2016)
violin and piano
8 minutes
Commissioned by Town Hall Symphony Hall (Birmingham) and the European Concert Hall Organisation, in memory of Lyndon Jenkins
FP: 3.10.2016, Town Hall, Birmingham, UK: Tamsin Waley-Cohen/Huw Watkins
Score and part 0-571-52056-1 on sale

Rosary Songs Op.9 (1972)
soprano, clarinet, viola and piano
Text (Ger): Georg Trakl
14 minutes
Commissioned by the Greater London Council for the South Bank Summer Workshop 1972
FP: 21.8.72, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, UK: Mary Thomas/Tires of London/Peter Maxwell Davies
Playing score 0-571-50540-6 on sale

Three Little Fantasies Op.6a (1970/83)
wind quintet
7 minutes
FP: (revised version) June 1983, Kingston Polytechnic, Kingston upon Thames, UK: Members of London Sinfonietta
Score 0-571-50879-0 and parts 0-571-51377-8 on sale

SOLO INSTRUMENTAL

Eccentric Melody (1998)
cello
2 minutes
FP: 11.2.99, Bargemusic, New York, USA: Fred Sherry
Score on special sale from the Hire Library

Masks Op.3 (1969)
flute with glass chimes ad lib
8 minutes
FP: January 1970, Northwestern University, Illinois, USA: Marjorie Shansky
Score 0-571-51106-6 on sale

Autumnal
‘Knussen wastes not a note, and though the work lasts only for seven minutes, its density of thought suggests something of sonata stature.’
Musical Times (Paul Griffiths), 1 August 1981

Cantata
‘Its highly concentrated form, its clarity of ideas and its astute manipulation of harmony and texture make for something of real substance.’
The Daily Telegraph (Geoffrey Norris), July 1997

Reflection
‘This beautifully crafted work is made of tiny aural brushstrokes suggesting water: ripples mirroring each other and bursting out in expression and ecstatic high lines.’
The Observer (Fiona Maddocks), 27 February 2017

‘Much more substantial than its short duration might suggest… Knussen’s writing has a marvellous fluidity.’
The Daily Telegraph (John Alison), 22 February 2017

Masks
‘Masks is a dramatic, arresting and ingenious composition in which the soloist’s positions and perambulations as well as his notes are indicated’.
The New Yorker (Andrew Porter), 11 November 1974

Ophelia’s Last Dance
‘A gorgeous, nostalgia-drenched, Scriabin-like waltz’
The Guardian (Andrew Clements), 28 May 2012

‘It begins with a dash of light-textured sparkle and a gently chromatic line, and as it grows more emotionally charged, its language veers toward neo-Romanticism rather than the harmonic density of Mr. Knussen’s earlier music.’
The New York Times (Allan Kozinn), 10 May 2010
Prayer Bell Sketch

'A hauntingly beautiful study in weight and measure, resonance and reverberation…'

The Times (Hilary Finch), 4 November 2001

'A little piece that says large things, a masterpiece of striving and achievement.'

Boston Globe (Richard Dyer), 27 July 1999

'It resonates outwards from a single chime, fragmented into its own overtones, pulsating through different rhythmic shapes, contained in quiet chords and, most eloquently, within silence itself.'

The Times (Hilary Finch), 16 June 1998

Sonya’s Lullaby

'Immediately attractive because of its clarity of sound and shape. The magical opening chords give way to a rocking ostinato which develops texturally and dynamically under an increasingly embellished melodic strand…The piano writing is rich and inventive.'

Music and Letters (Jonathan Dunsby), 4 August 1981

Variations

'The most gripping piece on the programme was his Variations for Piano… among the densest six minutes of music ever written, as massive textures collapse into delicate gestures and tiny phrases transform into huge outbursts. Knussen’s models when composing the piece were sets of variations by Webern, Stravinsky and Copland. His own set belongs in this company.'

The Guardian (Tom Service), 4 November 2002

Frammenti da “Chiara”

‘Beautiful pieces, glowing with sensuous harmony and their impassioned spirituality and other-worldliness…’

The Listener (Martin Pacey), 21 August 1986

‘Their musical imagery is fresh and evocative, and instantly appealing in the mellifluous fluidity of the choral writing.’

The Daily Telegraph (Robert Henderson), 24 June 1986

Four Late Poems

‘Knussen's unerring ear for the relationships among the sounds, colours and rhythms of the words, patterns that generate poetic meaning.’

Boston Globe (Richard Dyer), 17 August 2001

Ophelia’s Last Dance Op.32 (2009-10)

Ophelia Dances Book 2

piano

8 minutes

Commissioned by the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival for 2010 Gilmore Artist Kirill Gerstein, with funds from the Russell L. Gabier Fund

FP: 3.5.10, Gilmore International Keyboard Festival, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA: Kirill Gerstein

Score 0-571-51930-X on sale

Prayer Bell Sketch Op.29 (1997)

piano

5 minutes

Commissioned by Ms Masako Okamura and Mr Motoyuki Nakagawa in memory of Toru Takemitsu

FP: 22.9.97, Tokyo Opera City Takemitsu Memorial Concert Hall, Tokyo, Japan: Peter Serkin

Score 0-571-51952-0 on sale

Secret Psalm (1990)

violin

5 minutes

Written in memory of Michael Vyner (1943–1989)

FP: 6.5.90, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, UK: Nona Liddell

Score 0-571-52531-8 on sale

Sonya’s Lullaby Op.16 (1977-78)

Triptych Part 2

piano

6 minutes

FP: (preliminary version) 10.10.77, Galerie Schwarzes Kloster, Freiburg-in-Breisgau, Germany: Michael Finnissy

FP: (final version) 6.1.79, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Michael Finnissy

Score 0-571-50568-6 on sale

Study for “Metamorphosis” (1972 rev. 2018)

bassoon

c.5 minutes

Written at the request of the bassoonist Vincent Ellin for his recital at New England Conservatory in Boston, April 1972, the present version is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend of 40 years, the composer Alan Stout (26.11.1932 – 1.2.2018)

FP: April 1972, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA, USA: Vincent Ellin


Score 0-571-53657-3 on sale

Turba (1976)

double bass

6 minutes

Published by Margun Music Inc., publication no.MM4


piano

7 minutes

Commissioned for Peter Serkin by the 92nd Street Y with funds partly provided by the Mary Flager Cary Charitable fund

FP: 11.11.89, 92nd Street Y, New York, USA: Peter Serkin

Score 0-571-50568-6 on sale

Frammenti da “Chiara” Op.19a (1975/86)

2 antiphonal choirs of female voices a capella

Duration 8 minutes

(24 voices in all)


Vocal score 0-571-51109-0 on sale

CHORAL

Frammenti da “Chiara” Op.19a (1975/86)

Four Late Poems and an Epigram of Rainer Maria Rilke Op.23 (1988)

unaccompanied soprano

Text (Eng): Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. Stephen Mitchell

10 minutes

Commissioned by Jane Manning with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain

FP: 10.6.89, Aldeburgh Festival, Leiston Church, Leiston, UK: Jane Manning

Score 0-571-51096-5 on sale

VOCAL

Fourth Poem and an Epigram of Rainer Maria Rilke Op.23 (1988)

unaccompanied soprano

Text (Eng): Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. Stephen Mitchell

10 minutes

Commissioned by Jane Manning with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain

FP: 10.6.89, Aldeburgh Festival, Leiston Church, Leiston, UK: Jane Manning

Score 0-571-51096-5 on sale
Hums and Songs of Winnie the Pooh Op.6 (1970/83)  
soprano and chamber ensemble of five players  
See ensemble

O Hototogisu! (2017)  
fragment of a Japonisme for soprano, flute and large ensemble  
See ensemble

Océan de Terre Op.10 (1972-73/76)  
soprano and chamber ensemble of seven (or nine) players  
See ensemble

soprano and ensemble of 15 players  
See ensemble

Rosary Songs Op.9 (1972)  
soprano, clarinet, viola and piano  
See chamber

Trumpets Op.12 (1975)  
soprano and three clarinets  
Text (Ger): Georg Trakl  
4 minutes  
Written for Matrix  
FP: 27.2.75, Camden Festival, The Place, London, UK: Jane Manning/Matrix  
Study score 0-571-50541-4 on sale, playing score on special sale from the Hire Library

soprano and piano  
Text (Eng): Walt Whitman  
10 minutes  
Commissioned by the Amphion Foundation  
FP: (first three songs) 17.6.91, Aldeburgh Festival, Snape Maltings, Snape, UK: Lucy Shelton/Ian Brown  
FP: (complete) 15.10.91, BBC Pebble Mill, Birmingham, UK: Lucy Shelton/John Constable  
Score 0-571-51409-X on sale

ARRANGEMENTS

Pérotin: Alleluia Nativitas  
wind quintet  
8 minutes  
fl.ca.cl.bsn.hn  
Written for a South Bank Summerscope concert  
FP: 1.9.87, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, UK: Endymion Ensemble/Rupert Bawden  
A4 score 0-571-55568-3 (fp) and parts 0-571-55569-1 (fp) on sale

Berlioz: Deuxième prologue from Roméo et Juliette  
orchestration of the Deuxième prologue  
c.4 minutes  
2224 – 4030 – timp(2) – strings (15.15.10.11.9)  
FP: 6.10.95, Teatro Comunale di Ferrara, Ferrara, Emilia-Romagna, Italy: Monteverdi Choir/Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique/John Eliot Gardiner  
Score and parts for hire

Mussorgsky: Marriage  
one-act opera in four scenes  
chamber orchestra  
Text (Eng): Nikolai Gogol trans. Stephen Oliver  
35 minutes  
Singers: Podkolyzyn, a court councilor (Bar)/Kachkarov, his friend (T)/Fyokla Ivanovna, a matchmaker (MS)/Stepan, Podkolyzyn’s valet (B)  
2120 – 2000 – strings  
FP: 12.12.81, Bloomsbury Theatre, London, UK: Nexus Opera/Divertimenti/ Lionel Friend  
Full score, vocal score and parts for hire

Mussorgsky Miniatures  
arr. Knussen (1978)  
chamber orchestra  
5 minutes  
1121 – 2000 – strings  
FP: 15.4.11, City Hall, Glasgow, UK: Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Oliver Knussen  
Score and parts for hire

National Anthem  
arr. Knussen (1990)  
orchestra  
1 minute  
2222 – 4230 – timp – perc(2); 2 susp.cym/SD/tom-t/fgl/TD – harp – strings  
Score and parts for hire

National Anthems

Scriabin Settings  
arr. Knussen (1978)  
five miniatures arranged for chamber orchestra  
8 minutes  
1121 – 2000 – cel – strings (min 22221)  
Score and parts available from Music Sales Classical  
Published by GunMar Music, Inc., publication no.MG023

Rosary Songs

‘Fantastical lunar beauty…’  
The Times (Hilary Finch), 4 November 2002

‘A rather beautiful, full-blown romantic response to the dark surreal swirl of Trakl’s words, sustained by a lithe (in its litheness, almost Straussian) high-floating vocal line, and by a tightly-organised, but nonetheless heavily sensuous instrumental accompaniment.’  
Financial Times (Dominic Gill), 13 November 1976

Trumpets

‘Textures lurch precipitately between mysterious rustlings, mad gallops, cavernous echo-tones and shrieking, close-harmony fanfares in top clarinet register… beneath the harmonic surface there is a harmonic intelligence of rare cogency…’  
New Statesman (Bayan Northcott), 7 March 1975

‘A brilliantly imaginative response to the verbal world of Trakl. Always attentive both to the sound and sense of words Knussen super-imposes with tensile brilliance purely musical rhythms onto the rhythms of the poem.’  
Boston Globe (Richard Dyer), 15 August 1975

Whitman Settings

‘Intense miniatures of great beauty and technical accomplishment. The piano accompaniment is elaborate but always translucent.’  
The Singer (Matthew Greenall), March 1994

Scriabin Settings

‘Jewel-like and delicate…’  
The Guardian (Rowena Smith), 3 September 2008
DISCOGRAPHY

…upon one note
2003 London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 474 3222

Autumnal
2012 Alexander Wood/Huw Watkins
NMC Recordings D178

Cantata
1988 The Nash Ensemble
Unicorn-Kanchana UKCD2010
2017 Nicholas Daniel/Brindley Blackwood
Harmonia Mundi: HWM907672

Choral
2012 BBC Symphony Orchestra/Oliver Knussen
NMC Recordings D178

Courting
1988 Elaine Boy/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Unicorn-Kanchana UKCD2010

Flourish with Fireworks
1996 CBSO/Simon Rattle
EMI Classics 7243 5 66137 2
2002 Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra/Ingo Metzmacher
Sony 130081
2003 London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 474 3222

Four Late Poems and an Epigram of Rainer Maria Rilke
2002 Lisa Saffer
EMI Classics 7243 5 75296 2 4

Higgitty Pigglety Pop!
1984 Rosemary Hardy/Mary King/Hugh Hetherington/Stephen Rhys-Williams/Andrew Gallerche/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen/dir. Christopher Swan
2001 Cynthia Buchan/Lisa Saffer/Rosemary Hardy/Christopher Gillott/David Wilson-Johnson/Stephen Richardson/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 469 5562

Horn Concerto
2003 Barry Tuckwell/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 474 3222
2018 Félix Descave/Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam/
Ryan Wigglesworth
RCO 17004

Hums and Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh
2002 Lisa Saffer/Camber Music Society of Lincoln Center/Oliver Knussen
EMI Classics 7243 5 75296 2 4

Masks
2011 Laurel Zucker/Christopher Cook
Cantilena Records 660222

Music for a Puppet Court
2003 London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 474 3222

Notre Dame des Jouets
1994 Ron Ford
VPRO EW9413

Océan de Terre
2002 Lucy Shelton/Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center/Oliver Knussen
EMI Classics 7243 5 75296 2 4

Ophelia Dances Book 1
1988 London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Unicorn-Kanchana UKCD2010

Ophelia’s Last Dance
2010 Krill Gerstein
Myrios Classics MYR 005
2012 Huw Watkins
NMC Recordings D178

Prayer Bell Sketch
2000 Peter Serkin
Koch International Classics 3-7450-2
2012 Ryan Wigglesworth
NMC Recordings D178
2017 Florence Millet
Cybele Records 001

Requiem — Songs For Sue
2012 Claire Booth/Birmingham Contemporary Music Group/Oliver Knussen
NMC Recordings D178

Scriabin Settings
2008 Gürzenich-Orchester Köln/Oliver Knussen
Goliw 08/09

Secret Psalm
2012 Alexander Wood
NMC Recordings D178

Songs without Voices
2002 Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center/Oliver Knussen
EMI Classics 7243 5 75296 2 4

Sonata’s Lullaby
2002 Peter Serkin
EMI Classics 7243 5 75296 2 4

Symphony No.2
1988 Elaine Boy/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Unicorn-Kanchana UKCD2010

Symphony No.3
1988 Philharmonia/Michael Tilson Thomas
Unicorn-Kanchana UKCD2010
1990 Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Vladimir Ashkenazy
RPO 7015
2008 Gürzenich-Orchester Köln/Oliver Knussen
Goliw 08/09

Three Little Fantasies
1991 Aspen Wind Quintet
Bay Cities BCD 1030
1993 Esberg Ensemble
Kontrapunkt 32002

Trumpets
Oliver Knussen
Unicorn-Kanchana UKCD2010

Two Organs
2003 London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 474 3222

Variations
1994 Ananda Sukarlan
Erasmus Musikprodukte W1139
1996 Peter Serkin
RCA Victor Gold Seal 09026681892
2002 Peter Serkin
EMI Classics 7243 5 75296 2 4
2015 Benjamin Hochman
Avie AV2327

Violin Concerto
2012 Leila Josefowicz/BBC Symphony Orchestra/Oliver Knussen
NMC Recordings D178

The Way to Castle Yonder
2003 London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 474 3222

Where the Wild Things Are
2003 Rosemary Hardy/Mary King/Hugh Hetherington/Stephen Rhys-Williams/Andrew Gallerche/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen/dir. Christopher Swan
2001 Lisa Saffer/Mark King/Christopher Gillott/Quentin Hayes/
David Wilson-Johnson/Stephen Richardson/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 469 5562

Whitman Settings
2002 Lucy Shelton/Peter Serkin
EMI Classics 7243 5 75296 2 4
2012 Claire Booth/Ryan Wigglesworth
NMC Recordings D178

Whitman Settings (orchestral)
2003 Lucy Shelton/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen
Deutsche Grammophon 474 3222