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JUSTIN CONNOLLY (b.1933)

	<b>Verse Op. 7b</b> (1969)* for 8 soloists (SSAATTBB)	<b>(11'53" )</b>	<b>Poems of Wallace Stevens I Op. 9</b> (1967)**** for Soprano and 7 Instruments	<b>(11'36" )</b>
1	1 The world a hunting is	(4'46" )	12 1 Tattoo	(3'12" )
2	2 When silent I	(7'07" )	13 2 Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks	(3'17" )
	<b>Triad III Op. 8</b> (1966)** for Oboe, Viola and Cello	<b>(16'56" )</b>	14 3 The Snow Man	(5'11" )
3	1 Vivace	(6'15" )		<b>(57'11" )</b>
4	2 Misterioso	(3'40" )		
5	3	(7'01" )		
	<b>Cinquespaces Op. 5</b> (1965)*** for Brass Quintet	<b>(16'31" )</b>		
6	1 Prelude	(2'25" )		
7	2 Cinquespace I	(3'27" )		
8	3 Interlude I	(1'47" )		
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11	6 Cinquespace III	(4'47" )		

The above individual timings will normally each include two pauses. One before the beginning of each movement or work, and one after the end

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Lyrta

# Justin Connolly

## VERSE

John Alldis Choir

## TRIAD III

Vesuvius Ensemble

## CINQUESPACES

Philip Jones Brass Ensemble

## POEMS OF WALLACE STEVENS I

Jane Manning

The Nash Ensemble

conducted by Justin Connolly



Distinguishing features of Justin Connolly's compositions include a thrilling technical virtuosity at the service of expressive clarity, judicious juxtaposition of stasis and dynamism and a kaleidoscopic handling of short cell-like motifs within logically developed structures. This disc presents a representative selection of works from the 1960s, a time of both consolidation and experimentation for the composer, who had found his distinctive musical language and was exploring its range and flexibility through the medium of various instrumental and vocal ensembles.

Born in London on 11 August 1933 and educated at Westminster School, Connolly studied law at the Middle Temple before entering the Royal College of Music in 1958. There, he studied composition with Peter Racine Fricker, conducting with Sir Adrian Boult, and had informal contact with Roberto Gerhard. His music at this time, all later withdrawn, tended towards serialism. In 1963, he went to Yale University on a two-year Harkness Fellowship as a student of Mel Powell, subsequently teaching there for a year; during this period he gradually discovered his individual voice and enhanced his technique. He has held posts at both the Royal College of Music (1966-88) and the Royal Academy of Music (1989-96) and is a very experienced and respected broadcaster and teacher: Alwynne Pritchard was one of his pupils and he was a source of great encouragement to Minna Keal, who dedicated her Symphony to him.

Connolly was slower to establish himself as a composer than contemporaries such as Alexander Goehr, Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle, Nicholas Maw and Richard Rodney Bennett: his first published piece dates from 1964, by which time all the aforementioned composers had already produced a significant body of work. His earliest acknowledged pieces develop largely by resourceful use of tiny motifs within elaborate structures as in his series of *Triads* (1964-74), which also reflect his natural tendency towards writing for groupings of broadly diverse instruments. Another notable series is entitled *Tesserae*, scored for one and two instruments, and referring obliquely to the 19th century English hymn tune by Sir Hubert Parry, known as 'Repton' and usually sung to the words 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind', but never heard in anything like its original form.

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*Cover: Photograph of the composer courtesy of Chester/Novello.*

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*Recording location and date: 1972, St John's, Smith Square, London.*

*Digital Remastering Engineer: Simon Gibson*

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### The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing  
that is.

Two Proms commissions, the viola concerto *Anima* (1974) and the organ concerto *Diaphony* (1977) exhibit greater clarity and overtly dramatic tension expressed in longer paragraphs compared to the splintered, motivic nature of earlier works. In *Diaphony*, Connolly explores the 'dissonance of timbre' created by organ and orchestra, two complete and complex sound entities and tonal opposites operating together, each on its own terms. Due to ill health, Connolly produced few new works in the 1980s, until the motet *Spelt from Sybil's Leaves* (1989), a BBC commission setting poems by Lassus, Gerald Manley Hopkins and George Seferis (all connected in some way with the idea of an oracle) and scored for a characteristically novel combination of three horns, two harps, piano, bass guitar and two percussion players. The vocal lines (all amplified), for soprano, mezzo, tenor, baritone and bass, are invigorated by a fresh melodic strength.

Connolly's fluent and impressive output in the 1990s includes a number of accomplished chamber works, such as *Nocturnal* (1991), a suite of six movements for flutes (piccolo, concert flute, alto flute and bass flute) with piano, double bass and percussion, which encompasses elements of a seascape, both tempestuous and becalmed, and material of a meditative, mystical nature. Written in memory of a miniature spaniel called 'papillon', *Remembering the Butterfly* (1998), for flute and piano, is emotionally wide-ranging, from the elegiac, threnody-like opening and concluding sections to the spirited, gambolling central episode where the canine inspiration for the piece seems to appear in the present tense. In the atmospheric *Scardenelli Dreams* (1997-8), a structurally and rhythmically challenging cantata for mezzo-soprano and piano, five fragments of Hölderlin are sung in parallel with ten solo piano movements, which provide a continuous, independent commentary on all the texts.

Outstanding among his more recent works are Sonatina No.2: *Ennead* (2000), for solo piano, conceived in nine concentrated and interrelated sections and a substantial and powerful Piano Concerto (2003), a BBC commission for pianist Nicholas Hodges, whose form and spirit are influenced by the ancient idea of the labyrinth, the forces of soloist and orchestra being well suited to the roles of Theseus and the Minotaur, where one

protagonist signifies the existence of the other and the distinction between hero and villain is not always apparent.

**VERSE Op.7b** (1969)

This diptych, for eight solo voices, is a companion piece to Connolly's earlier *Prose* (1967), for unaccompanied chorus. It was commissioned by the John Alldis Choir, who premièred it on 23 March 1969 at the Purcell Room, London. *Verse* is a setting of two poems, the first, 'The world a hunting is', by William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585-1649), and the second, 'When silent I', by Thomas Traherne (1637-1674). The text emphasises the inexorable horrors of a perpetually threatened existence, contrasting the grim conditions of existence with a sense of wonder at humanity's continued survival.

Connolly achieves telling sound-images in this vividly realised choral work, which inspires some of his most deeply felt music. Revealing the composer's instinctive grasp of technique, the settings conjure up a brutal image of the world as a wild hunt with man as defenceless prey, succeeded by an evocation of the 'shining eternity' in which his consolation lies. At the outset, the first syllable of the word 'hunting' is sung *quasi corno*, imitating horn-led hunting calls and later, unvoiced vowels are used to convey the effect of 'heavy canine respiration!' In some ways a culmination of the composer's early development, *Verse* contains some of his most imaginative use of words allied to an inventive series of vocal effects, including speech, whispering, prolonged consonantal sounds such as 's' or rolled 'r' and combined speech and singing.

The world a hunting is,  
The prey poor man,  
The Nimrod fierce is death.  
His speedy greyhounds are  
Lust, sickness, envy, care,  
Strife that ne'er falls amiss,  
With all those ills which haunt us  
While we breathe.  
Now if by chance we fly  
Of these the eager chase,

**Poems of Wallace Stevens I**

**Tattoo**

The light is like a spider.  
It crawls over the water.  
It crawls over the edges of the snow.  
It crawls under your eyelids  
And spreads its webs there —  
Its two webs.

The webs of your eyes  
Are fastened  
To the flesh and bones of you  
As to rafters or grass.

There are filaments of your eyes  
On the surface of the water  
And in the edges of the snow

**Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks**

In the moonlight  
I met Berserk,  
In the moonlight  
On the bushy plain.  
Oh, sharp he was  
As the sleepless!

And, "Why are you red  
In this milky blue?"  
I said.

"Why sun-colored,  
As if awake  
In the midst of sleep?"

"You that wander,"  
So he said,  
"On the bushy plain,  
Forget so soon.  
But I set my traps  
In the midst of dreams."

I knew from this  
That the blue ground  
Was full of blocks  
And blocking steel.  
I knew the dread  
Of the bushy plain,

And the beauty  
Of the moonlight  
Falling there,  
Falling  
As sleep falls  
In the innocent air.

and September 1967 and premièred on 18 May 1968 at the Purcell Room, London, by Jane Manning and members of the Nash Ensemble, conducted by the composer.

Connolly sets three poems by the distinguished American poet Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), dating from widely different periods in his life, but whose points of contact are highlighted by presenting them together (in this respect, it created a precedent followed by the second in the composer's series of Wallace Stevens poem settings, written in 1970). In the first poem, 'Tattoo', the observer of a snowscape appears to become what he sees, while in the second, 'Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks', a dreamer meets with a Doppelgänger figure in fearful, but strangely beautiful, surroundings. In the final setting, these images are combined in the figure of 'The Snow Man', a grotesque parody of a living being, made in our image, yet made of nothing.

In a work featuring a strikingly extensive range of colours, Connolly devises imitative, almost physical sounds to evoke the Spider in 'Tattoo', and the work proceeds with equally vivid painterly touches, including text harshly whispered by members of the ensemble in the dark, hallucinatory heart of the central setting and eerily oscillating lines, both vocal and instrumental, to evoke the wind blowing through a desolate landscape in the final poem. The vocal writing, though always at the service of the text, is exhilaratingly demanding throughout the piece, including high, middle or low pitched speech sounds, passages scored for an unvoiced whispering tone, notation where the final 's' of a word is prolonged in a hissing sound and a conscious merging of voice and ensemble.

The seven instruments illustrate the rapidly changing imagery of the poems, their rich and varied timbres deftly conveying the undercurrents of Stevens' poetic imagery. Connolly's lean and angular expressiveness, natural gift for word setting and sophisticated, but always idiomatic, instrumental writing are all successfully incorporated in this intuitive uniting of music and text.

PAUL CONWAY

Old age with stealing pace  
Casts up his nets,  
and there we panting die.

**William Drummond of Hawthornden**

When silent I so many thousand years  
Beneath the dust did in a chaos lie,  
How could I smiles or tears  
Or lips or hands or eyes or ears perceive?

I that so long  
Was nothing from eternity  
Did little think such joys as ears and tongue  
To celebrate or see,  
Such sounds to hear, such hands to feel, such feet  
Such eyes and objects on the ground to meet.

From dust I rise,  
And out of nothing now awake,  
These brighter regions that salute my eyes  
A gift I take,  
The earth, the seas, the light, the lofty skies  
The sun and stars are mine if these I prize.

A stranger here  
Strange things doth meet strange glory see  
Strange treasures lodged in this fair world appear.  
Strange, all, and new to me;  
But that they mine should be who nothing was,  
That strangest is of all; yet brought to pass.

**Thomas Traherne**

### **TRIAD III Op.8 (1966)**

*Triad III*, for oboe, viola and cello was first performed on 8 December 1967 in the Wigmore Hall, London by members of the Vesuvius Ensemble, to whom the work is dedicated. It is one of a number of Connolly's pieces that are each musically independent, yet have in common certain formal attributes. Each is in three main sections, using combinations of three instruments not usually encountered in the classic trio repertoire, hence the title *Triad*.

Fragmentary and mosaic-like, *Triad III* consists of two fleeting, sparkling outer movements, anchored by one of Connolly most beautiful and affecting inspirations, the mesmeric, slowly unfolding central movement, marked *Misterioso*, with its lithe and intricately wrought oboe solo. The work interleaves material which is unchanged but appears in different contexts and material which is itself varied and transformed, an effect similar to three-dimensional processes found in the works of Harrison Birtwistle, whose subject matter reveals new facets and emphases by being perceived from different angles.

A genuine piece of chamber music, *Triad III* is, for the most part, conversational in tone. The lines are sharply defined, but the dialogue between oboe and strings is eminently flexible. Though the *arioso*-like oboe line predominates, the strings comment on and throw further light on it, rarely required to assume a conventional subsidiary, accompanying role.

### **CINQUEPACES Op.5 (1965)**

Scored for brass quintet consisting of two trumpets, horn, trombone and tuba, *Cinquepaces* was the first work of Connolly's to firmly establish his name as a composer and it quickly became one of his most celebrated and often performed pieces. Dedicated to Peter Racine Fricker, it won the Alfred Clements Memorial Prize in 1967 and was premièred by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble on 6 July 1968 at a concert promoted by the Society for the Promotion of New Music as part of the Cheltenham Festival. The title, derived from the French 'cinq pas', comes from a generic term describing certain

Elizabethan dances, such as the galliard. Their style was forceful and athletic, analogous to modern ballet, the dancers were usually male, and the sequences were frequently devised for pairs of soloists rather than a single performer.

A robust response to an invitation to compose an idiomatic brass piece, *Cinquepaces* is more formally clear-cut than is customary in Connolly's works. It consists of three main dance movements, separated by two interludes and enclosed by a prelude and coda. The dances are strictly metrical, while the other, more static sections employ unmeasured music in free rhythm. However, during the first two *Cinquepaces*, fragments of music played at a speed different from the dances themselves are introduced, and the essence of the prelude and interludes is allowed subtly to permeate the dances; the alien nature of this interjectory material is emphasised by the fact that the instruments playing it are muted. The second *Cinquepace* brings to the fore *concertante* elements, including solo and duet material for all the players, whilst in the third and final dance movements, the metrical music is restored, and the material gradually transforms itself into a measured, chordal coda, which ignites into several cadenza-like episodes before its spectacularly pattering *pianissimo* conclusion.

*Cinquepaces* betrays its terpsichorean origins, being generally muscular and sinewy and tending towards dynamic virtuosity, and the composer has indicated that the players might be regarded as not just the five steps of the dance, but the actual dancers themselves. Connolly demonstrates an absolute grasp of dramatic form and an outstanding and compelling handling of the brass ensemble, achieving a fine balance between divertimento-like qualities of the work and its natural inclination towards virtuosity and display, which becomes more acute as it progresses. Despite its undoubted technical brilliance, *Cinquepaces* also has the capacity for great beauty of sound, not least the eloquent tuba *arioso* in the first interlude, which is on a par with the florid and responsive oboe solo in the central movement of *Triad III*.

### **POEMS OF WALLACE STEVENS I Op.9 (1967)**

*Poems of Wallace Stevens I* is scored for soprano and an ensemble of seven instruments, consisting of flute (doubling piccolo), clarinet in B-flat (doubling bass clarinet), trumpet in C, viola, vibraphone, celesta (doubling piano) and harp. It was written between August

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for 8 soloists (SSAATTBB)

(11'53")

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(16'56")

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(16'31")

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14 3 The Snow Man (5'11")

(57'11")

## \* John Alldis Choir

## \*\* Vesuvius Ensemble

Janet Craxton, oboe Brian Hawkins, viola  
Charles Tunnell, cello

## \*\*\* Philip Jones Brass Ensemble

Philip Jones, trumpet Elgar Howarth, trumpet  
Ifor James, horn, John Iveson, trombone  
John Fletcher, tuba\*\*\*\* Jane Manning, soprano  
The Nash Ensemble  
conducted by  
Justin Connolly

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