"...if you have any serious interest in opera, you simply must hear it ... it left me both stunned and elated. A masterpiece, no question". Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph*

"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". Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*

For more information visit www.wyastone.co.uk/benjamin-into-the-little-hill.html
Photographs taken during performances at Aix-en-Provence in July 2012

Witten on Skin
Commissioned by
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Written on Skin
Music by George Benjamin
Text by Martin Crimp

After the anonymous 13th century raze
‘Guillem de Cabestanh – Le Cœ ur Mangé’

Characters

THE PROTECTOR  Christopher Purves
AGNÈS his wife  Barbara Hannigan
ANGEL 1 / THE BOY  Bejun Mehta
ANGEL 2 / MARIE  Rebecca Jo Loeb
ANGEL 3 / JOHN  Allan Clayton

Duet
for Piano & Orchestra
Soloist, Pierre-Laurent Aimard

Mahler Chamber Orchestra
George Benjamin conductor
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The recording of Duet was supported by the Nimbus Foundation.

Recorded live in the Grand Théâtre de Provence, Festival d’Aix-en-Provence
Written on Skin 7 & 14 July, 2012
Director : Katie Mitchell
Set design & costumes : Vicki Mortimer
Lighting : Jon Clark
Assistant music director : Gerry Cornelius
Répétiteurs : Ouri Bronchti, Alphonse Cemin, Mathieu Pordoy
Actors : Laura Harling, Peter Hobday, Sarah Northgrave, David Alexander Parker
Festival Administration : Alain Perroux, Béatrice de Laage, Chrystolene Dupont

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Duet 15 July, 2012
Recordings made by Radio France
Producer : Paul Malinowski.  Engineer : Cyril Becue, assisted by Cécile Bracq, Jean-Baptiste Etchepareborde, Amandine Grevoz, Alain Piet.  Editing : Cécile Bracq

Bejun Mehta appears courtesy of harmonia mundi
Pierre-Laurent Aimard appears courtesy of Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft

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The Mahler Chamber Orchestra was founded in 1997 by former members of the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra, with support from Claudio Abbado. The ensemble had its breakthrough in the summer of 1998, with a production of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* under the direction of Claudio Abbado at the opera festival in Aix-en-Provence. When the MCO gave its debut at the Teatro Real in Madrid in 2008 with *Fidelio* under Abbado’s direction, Le Monde called it “the best orchestra in the world.”

The 45 core members of the MCO come from 20 different countries. The Mahler Chamber Orchestra is not supported by a government funding structure, and it is financed primarily by concert revenues, with help from donations and sponsors.

Daniel Harding is, alongside founder Claudio Abbado, the conductor who has played the most significant role in the orchestra’s history: in 1998 at the age of 22, he was named Principal Guest Conductor; in 2003 the orchestra chose him as their Music Director, and in 2008 he became Principal Conductor. In summer 2011, the musicians voted unanimously to give Daniel Harding the permanent title of Conductor Laureate.

The MCO Academy was founded in 2009 as part of the MCO Residence NRW and in collaboration with the Orchesterzentrum NRW in Dortmund. The Academy represents a multi-level concept for the training and education of aspiring orchestral musicians and includes individual instruction, chamber music workshops, and audition preparation. The MCO Academy includes a growing international network and currently collaborates with institutions in Barcelona, Manchester, Norway, and Australia.

In January 2012, the MCO’s new education and outreach programme MCO Landings was launched. The programme consists of two main areas: instrumental coaching and music outreach. Currently, the largest MCO Landings project is ‘Feel the Music’, which runs parallel to ‘The Beethoven Journey’ with Leif Ove Andsnes in 2012-2015. In collaboration with the British organisation ‘Music and the Deaf’, the MCO and Leif Ove Andsnes introduce deaf and hearing-impaired children to the world of the orchestra, exploring the world of music with them through hearing, feeling, and creating.

The MCO’s recordings include operas with Claudio Abbado and Daniel Harding, aria collections with Anna Netrebko and Jonas Kaufmann, and a Rachmaninoff CD with the young Chinese pianist Yuja Wang. Most recently, in 2012, a recording of the opera *Don Giovanni* from Baden-Baden was released on the Deutsche Grammophon label, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

Bernard Focroulle, Directeur général du Festival d’Aix-en-Provence

Accompanying the birth of *Written on Skin* has been an exceptional journey in many ways. In 1992, I started asking George Benjamin whether he would like to write an opera for La Monnaie. At that time, he was not ready. A few years later, I invited him to conduct *Pelléas et Mélisande*, one of his favourite operas. In 2004, he composed *Dance Figures*, a beautiful orchestral piece that was premiered at la Monnaie with choreography by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. Then came in December 2006 *Into the Little Hill*, an exquisite short opera composed to a text by Martin Crimp, commissioned by Joséphine Markovits for the Festival d’Automne in Paris. After that first and very successful operatic experience, George said he was ready to write a full evening opera. We started discussing it seriously in early 2007.

Through these years, I have been amazed to see the deep understanding between George and Martin, at every level of their collaboration. It is difficult to find a text (Martin doesn’t like to use the word “libretto”) that opens so many possibilities for both the music and the stage. At each performance I have attended so far, I discovered new details, new aspects, new layers. Of course, the staging of Katie Mitchell revealed many of these aspects, much more than the reading of the text or the music alone could reveal at first instance. The very sophisticated time dimension of the text (and in a certain way of the music) found a stimulating concretization thanks to the set and costumes by Vicky Mortimer.

Both George and Martin participated in the casting of singers, combining vocal and stage qualities. George got the chance to know at a very early stage for whom and for which voices he was writing his opera. Even if many other singers will perform this opera over the years, the fact he took the time to meet and hear and study the vocal possibilities of each of them was certainly a source of a profound knowledge of the potential of all voices. The result is just incredible: the time where voices were treated like instruments is now over!

One of the most memorable moments on that journey was the first “Italienne”, when George conducted – and heard – for the first time his piece sung by the singers and played by the Mahler Chamber Opera. I will never forget that run-through, and the very deep emotion we all felt at the end, singers, musicians, friends… From that moment on, each rehearsal, each performance reinforced our strong feeling of facing a real masterpiece, an opera that will stay as a key moment in 21st century opera. In that respect, the premiere in Aix-en-Provence on July 7, 2012, was the end of a long process, and more important, the beginning of the life of a new opera. For professionals and amateurs who believe that opera is an art form of the past, *Written on Skin* brilliantly demonstrates it is still an art of and for our time.
Angels of History
Martin Crimp

The seed for the text was the suggestion by Bernard Foccroulle, director of the Festival d’Aix-en-Provence, leading commissioner of the work, that it might be interesting to dramatise a story whose origins were Provençal. This led me, after a lot of reading, to the anonymous 13th century story ‘Guillaume de Cabestanh — Le Cœur Mangé’ — whose strange staging of exceptional brutality in a context of artistic refinement appealed to both George and myself.

Unlike our previous collaboration, Into the Little Hill, which was a contemporary updating of an old story, we decided it was important for this opera to retain the cultural specifics of the 13th century world, whose Judaeo-Christian ethics and sexual taboos — particularly about women and their autonomy — continue to cast a long shadow over the present. At the same time, I had an instinctive desire to allow our contemporary world to bleed through into the drama. Hence my invention of the 21st century angels who initiate and provoke the action, and even — in the case of The Boy — enter into it.

These angels have two sources: one, their haunting presence within and at the margins of the medieval manuscripts I examined while I was writing the text; the other, the ‘Angel of History’ as described by Walter Benjamin. This is a figure who looks back at the catastrophes of the past, and would like to return and waken the dead. This, however, is impossible, since he is propelled inexorably towards the future by a storm blowing from paradise.

Written on Skin
An Interview with George Benjamin by Marie Luise Maintz, August, 2012

The style of the libretto, was already invented for your lyric tale Into the Little Hill: the combination of direct speech and outside perspective of a narrator, the figures telling their own story. This, I assume, has far going consequences for the concept of the composition.

Martin invented this ‘narrative’ technique — in its most extreme from — with his play ‘Attempts on Her Life’, which impressed me enormously when I first read it. The texts that he has written for both of our operas combine this approach with a more direct, linear form of story-telling, creating a hybrid style.

Mahler Chamber Orchestra

In its 15 years of existence, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO) has developed into one of the most artistically interesting and successful ensembles on the international classical music scene. A travelling orchestra with no fixed home location, the MCO is on the move about 200 days each year. The orchestra’s life is also shaped by regular longer visits to its three residences in Ferrara (Italy), in North Rhine-Westphalia (a combination residence in the German cities of Dortmund, Essen, and Cologne) and at the Lucerne Festival, where the MCO forms the core of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra each summer. In spring 2011, the MCO was named Cultural Ambassador of the European Union. With the MCO Academy and the education and outreach programme MCO Landings, the orchestra is increasingly involved in teaching and community work.
Other operatic roles include Meg Page in Falstaff, Jenny in The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, Elmirè in Tartuffe, Paquette in Candide, Madame Brilliante in L’italiana in Londra, Dorothée in Cendrillon, and Second Witch and The Spirit, in Dido and Aeneas.

A champion of new music, Rebecca Jo has recorded the songs of both Stephan Wolpe and Ursula Monk for Bridge Records. She performed roles in Lucrezia and Bastianello (operas commissioned for the New York Festival of Song by William Bolcom and John Musto, respectively) at the Moab Music Festival, the role of the Swiss Grandmother in John Adams’ Death of Klinghoffer with Mr. Adams conducting, and the songs of Tom Cipullo and Ricky Ian Gordon with the composers at the piano.

Equally at home in musical theater, Rebecca Jo has performed with the Boston Pops as Carrie inCarousel and Petra in A Little Night Music, and made her Broadway debut in a benefit entitled Ladies Who Sing Sondheim starring Angela Lansbury and Deborah Monk. Her awards include the Curt Englehorn Scholarship from the Opera Foundation, First Prize in the Lotte Lenya Competition, a 2009 Career Bridges Grant, the Ginney and John Starkey Young Artist Awards at Central City Opera, and the Stanley Medal from the University of Michigan.

Pierre-Laurent Aimard

Widely acclaimed as a key figure in the music of our time and as a uniquely significant interpreter of piano repertoire from every age, Pierre-Laurent Aimard enjoys an internationally celebrated career. He performs throughout the world each season with major orchestras and conductors. He has been invited to create, direct and perform in a number of residencies, with recent projects including at Carnegie Hall, New York’s Lincoln Center, Vienna’s Konzerthaus, Berlin’s Philharmonie, the Lucerne Festival, Mozarteum Salzburg, Cité de la Musique in Paris, the Tanglewood Festival and London’s Southbank Centre - where he was Artistic Advisor to the ‘Exquisite Labyrinth’ festival celebrating

This mixture of indirect and more ‘natural’ writing appeals to me hugely. It has a strangeness which, I feel, literally makes space for my music. And the language he uses is always of great simplicity – and thus suited to vocal setting – but the structures Martin invents through these linguistic idioms are of considerable complexity, and that also appeals to me. And finally, I don’t think there is a single word in what he writes which doesn’t contain some form of intense emotional weight...

After Alban Berg’s Wozzeck has been recognised as a peak of ‘modern’ opera, composers in the second half the 20th century have tried multiple ways to find new forms of music theatre, and those of the 21st continue trying. Was it important to you to ‘invent’ a new form?

I will leave that to others to judge – in the end, my overriding aim, at all times, has simply been to serve the text and the drama to the best of my abilities. I will add, however, that I have reflected continuously on the challenges of contemporary opera over the last 25 years or so, and I assert a certain independence from both past and present models in what I have written.

How do you approach composing a dramatic text for voice, as opposed to composing a poem?

Very simply, a poetic text usually requires a reflective, even static approach to time, while a dramatic work needs a more dynamic attitude. In a work on this scale – a new departure for me – one of the main challenges is to maintain sufficient diversity of invention and expression, while sustaining a continuing arc of tension across the whole structure. This means risking a greater heterogeneity of technique and idiom than in a smaller, abstract work, while keeping an iron grip on the rhythmic and harmonic underpinning on the largest scale.

How did you approach the decisions: about the voice characters, the instrumentation, form, architecture and other parameters of the composition?

Many issues regarding the architecture of the work evolved during the months before Martin started writing the text. We met and corresponded frequently, and our collaboration on this work – over about five years – remained intense and close throughout. It was Bernard Foccauroule who initially suggested that we might employ a countertenor – something I immediately accepted, particularly as the idea of duets with a soprano very much appealed to my imagination. From that decision the rest of the distribution evolved quickly and simply.

I was asked to limit my orchestra to 60 players, and this challenge focused my instrumental choices. The score was also conceived for – and first performed by – the exceptional Mahler Chamber Orchestra, who I first conducted in Lucerne in 2009; their unique sonority made quite an impact on me then! In my instrumentation some expanded groups of instruments (four clarinets, four trumpets and four percussionists) are balanced by slightly reduced strings (8 6 6 6 4). And then there
are the two “extra” players – a bass viola da gamba and a glass harmonica, both instruments for which I have a particular affection, and both reserved for special moments in the opera. Though the vocal lines always take precedence - and therefore the instrumental background is frequently discreet - I did want to have a very wide palette of orchestral colour, in part to evoke the world of the medieval illuminator.

As for the precise dramatic form, in the end that was Martin’s role – and I was happy to tackle the challenges he set me. I very much wanted to give each scene a distinct atmosphere, sound and idiom – with a quasi-cinematic cut between them. Though there are numerous short passages for the orchestra alone, none of them form conventional transitional interludes between scenes; indeed the majority are placed within the scenes themselves.

Each scene has a specific harmonic and timbral tone, as well as a distinct rhythmic underpinning. Though there are no specific leitmotifs, types of harmony do recur frequently across the work, and this long-term harmonic design helps – I hope – to sustain a sense of coherence and tension across the opera’s complete duration, thus subverting the division into scenes.

The individual scenes seem to me like pictures combined with an impression of timelessness. In terms of chronological time, this opera inhabits a strange hybrid territory – both 21st-century and Medieval. As for the experiential sense of time shared by the protagonists on stage, much of the time they don’t ‘hear’ each other and seem in segregated worlds – hence the very frequent simultaneous divisions into opposed pitch collections and metres. Moments of genuine communication – in particular, the love scene at the end of Part One – are rare. And, as the three main characters also narrate their own roles as the story evolves we are, I believe, a long way from the sense of time associated with more naturalistic opera.

I would like to ask about your musical means, like the colouring of the voices through orchestration: obvious ones like the ‘remote’ sound and figurations of the bass viol in the love scene Agnès/Bay or the Glass harmonica or the mandolin plus harp. Or about harmonic means like the sharp chords in the energetic introduction scene, which create the field for the cruelty of the subject, or the thirds in the love scene IV, or the bass heart beats when the Protector’s fear and rage is growing.

But for me the sound of the viol isn’t ‘remote’ – it is simply a gorgeous sonic resource, highly resonant and exceedingly rich in harmonics. I have tried to emphasize these characteristics by ‘coating’ the viol’s sound in a web of practice-muted brass, all playing fortissimo yet sounding pianissimo, the force of the bowing making their sound shimmer...

Eagar’s The Dream of Gerontius (Bach Choir), Britten’s Les Illuminations (Britten Sinfonia) on tour through South America, Britten’s St Nicolas cantata, and Il Tabarro in concert at the BBC Proms with the BBC Philharmonic and Gianandrea Noseda.

As a recitalist Allan has worked with many outstanding pianists including Paul Lewis, Julius Drake, and Malcolm Martineau, in performances of Schubert’s Song Cycles, Vaughan Williams’s On Wenlock Edge and the songs of Strauss, Wolf, Britten, Duparc, and Tippett.

His recordings include a Gramophone-nominated Otello for LSO Live, Handel’s Messiah for EMI, a DVD of Dove’s The Adventures of Pinocchio, Joshua (London Handel Society/Lawrence Cummings), Britten’s Micheangelo Sonnets with Malcolm Martineau, and Saint Nicholas with City of London Sinfonia conducted by Stephen Layton.

Allan Clayton studied at St John’s College, Cambridge and at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Rebecca Jo Loeb

Hailed as “a theatrical performer whose rise to watch” (Opera News 2010) and a “dusky-toned mezzo” (New York Times 2008), Rebecca Jo Loeb recently joined the Ensemble of the Hamburgische Staatsopera making such role debuts as Cherubino in Le Nozze di Figaro, Rosina in Barbiere di Siviglia, Hänsel in Hänsel und Gretel, Dryade in Ariadne auf Naxos, Page in Salome, and The Countess of Essex in Gliorina. In the 2010-2011 season she made her debuts at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and the Teatro Regio di Torino as well as her debut at Dallas Opera as Fyodor in Boris Godunov. While in Berlin she also continued her close relationship with the music of Kurt Weill performing in concerts with the Kurt Weill Fest in Dessau and the Brecht Festival in Augsburg. She has appeared in Ravinia as Bessie in Kurt Weill’s Mahagonny Songspiel under James Conlon, as the Second Fairy in Mendelssohn’s Midsummer Night’s Dream with the New York City Ballet. She made her Carnegie Hall debut as the alto soloist in Bach’s B minor Mass, and at Alice Tully Hall with the Riverside Symphony singing Bolcom’s Cabaret Songs.
He made his debut as a recitalist at the Aldeburgh Festival and subsequently at Opera North and Kettle’s Yard in Cambridge for performances of Schubert’s Schwanengesang. Christopher works regularly with Simon Lepper. Recordings include the title role La Nozze di Figaro for Chandos Records, Messiah with Harry Christophers and The Sixteen and Maria di Rohan for Opera Rara.

Other engagements include: Mahler’s 8th Symphony at the Casa da Musica in Porto, Nick Shadow, The Rake’s Progress for Opéra de Lille, Balstrode Peter Grimes for La Scala and Walt Disney in Philipp Glass’ The Perfect American for Teatro Real Madrid and ENO, his debut at Chicago Lyric Opera as Sharpless in Madama Butterfly, a return to Houston Grand Opera as Alberich in his first Das Rheingold. Siegfried and Göttterdammerung.

Allan Clayton
Allan Clayton has quickly established himself as one of the most exciting and sought after singers of his generation. A consummate actor and deeply sensitive musician he has already made a huge impact on the international operatic and concert scene. Recent concerts include Act 2 of Wagner’s Die Meistersinger (David) (Hallé/Sir Mark Elder), Handel’s Belisazzar (Les Arts Florissants/William Christie), and Handel’s Theodora (Les Violons du Roy/Bernard Labadie) in Quebec.

On stage, his roles have included Ferrando/Cosi fan tutte at the New York City Opera, Royal Opera House, Opera North, and the Glyndebourne Festival; Béatrice/Beatrix et Bénédicte for Opéra Comique, Paris; Castor/Castor et Pollux and Lysander/A Midsummer Night’s Dream for English National Opera; Belmonte/Die Entführung aus dem Serail, Lampwick in the world premiere of Jonathan Dove’s The Adventures of Pinocchio.

Concert appearances include Mendelssohn’s Elijah (New York Philharmonic), Berlioz’s L’Enfance du Christ (Britten Sinfonia/Sir Mark Elder); Verdi’s Otello (Cassio) (LSO/Sir Colin Davis), Haydn’s The Seasons (Gabrieli Consort),

Harmonic means? That has always been my obsession, even before I studied with Messiaen in Paris...

Could you tell me about the voice lines: Do you follow a model of natural speaking and extreme exclamation in emotionally loaded moments?

No, that would be far too simple! Wide intervals are the exception, but they are used in calm as well as agitated circumstances. The standard disjunct intervals – minor sevenths and minor ninths – of post-serial music have, for me, remained far too prevalent in contemporary music over recent decades, and so I use them sparingly. The even wider intervals – of major 10ths and perfect 12ths – are used more frequently in the vocal writing, particularly in Agnès’s role.

One almost arbitrary element has had a strong influence on the use of vocal tessitura, and that is the vowels of my home language. I try, almost without exception, to reserve high notes for open vowels.

An important area for my approach to writing for the voice is the perceptible integration of the lines into the surrounding orchestral harmony. My desire is that this be very clear, to singer as well as listener. When someone is singing, as a result, the accompaniment usually has a simpler harmonic continuity than when the orchestra is alone.

A question about the intertwining in the dialogues: sometimes it seems to me like a naturalistic imitation of the ‘real’ speaking rhythm in a dialogue, when people interrupt each other or keep speaking while the other is talking.

Martin’s use of narrated speech in his text acknowledges – and indeed exploits, instead of trying to disguise – the artificiality of the operatic medium, particularly as it seems now in the 21st century. The overlapping of text in my setting has a similar purpose – it side-steps naturalism, as well as allowing for a much more flexible pace of vocal setting and dramatic context. In tandem with this, however, it is crucial that the story being told is clear and comprehensible – otherwise confusion would result.

Martin Crimp’s text already presents a distinct, strong rhythm which you transform into your music. Can you say something about the specific challenge of that language?

With Martin’s strong encouragement I frequently subverted the natural speech rhythms of his text, even ignoring the repetitive metrical patterns his words sometimes suggest. My initial sketches for any specific passage often concerned the spacing and timing of the words before anything else, and at all times such decisions were governed by the imagined dramatic situation.
The meaning of the phrase Written on Skin may also apply to the act of composing, meaning the hand-writing of thousands of notes, the slow procedure of doing that. Has it played a role for you that you write an opera about an artist (and similar to that before, into the Little Hill the centre of the story is the Pied Piper, someone who enchants with music)?

I cannot answer that – though of course the act of creating in solitude does concern me, as that is the life of a composer! But for Martin and me, the title simply refers to just two things – the act of illuminating on velum (animal skin) and the erotic overtones of those same words.

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Duet for Piano & Orchestra
Commissioned by ROCHE for the 2008 Lucerne Festival, Pierre-Laurent Aimard (piano) and the Cleveland Orchestra conducted by Franz Welser-Möst.

With its vast range and virtuosic capacities the piano is in its own right almost the equivalent of an orchestra. So this Duet is an encounter between two equal partners, partners whose capacities, however, diverge in numerous essential ways. The piano can transverse over seven octaves with the greatest ease and, with the help of the sustaining pedal, accumulate harmonies containing literally dozens of notes. These are feats with which no orchestral instrument can compete. And yet every note of the piano begins to die away immediately after being struck, a characteristic so different from the capacities of string and wind instruments.

I have attempted to cross the divide between the soloist and the orchestra by finding compatible areas between them, specifically by dividing the piano into a few distinct registers with timbral equivalents in the orchestra. At the same time the piano remains an alien figure in the orchestral landscape and often treads an independent path through instrumental textures that can seem intentionally oblivious of it.

The orchestra employed is somewhat reduced, above all by the absence of violins. A certain prominence is given to the piano’s nearest relatives in tuned percussion and, especially, the harp.

This Duet is dedicated with admiration and gratitude to Pierre-Laurent Aimard, my friend since the earliest days of my studies.

Christopher Purves
Born in Cambridge, Christopher Purves was a choral scholar at King’s College Cambridge where he studied English. On leaving university he joined the highly innovative rock & roll group Harvey and the Wallbangers, touring and recording, before he was offered the opportunity to sing Don Pasquale with Opera 80. He subsequently appeared in Mozart’s Mass in C in Aix-en-Provence with Harry Christophers and The Sixteen, followed by his debut at English National Opera as Masetto in Don Giovanni. Christopher has enjoyed much critical acclaim for his interpretations of Wozzeck at Welsh National Opera, Tonio Pagliacci for English National Opera and more recently the title role in Faust at the Glyndebourne Festival and Beckmesser in Die Meistersinger for Welsh National Opera.

He has sung Marco Gianni Schicchi at Covent Garden, the title role in Don Giovanni, and The General in James Macmillan’s The Sacrifice for Welsh National Opera, Alcina at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich and Sharpless in Anthony Minghella’s production of Madame Butterfly for English National Opera. Christopher made his Salzburg debut in Katie Mitchell’s production of Nono’s Al gran sole carico d’amore, a Berlin. He created the role of Executioner in James Macmillan’s Ines de Castro for Scottish Opera and appeared in Parthenogenesis also by Macmillan at the Edinburgh International Festival. In the 2010/11 season Christopher made his debut at Houston Grand Opera as Balstrode in Peter Grimes and at the Netherlands Opera as Redburn in Billy Budd. In London he sang Méphistophélès in Terry Gilliam’s acclaimed production of The Damnation of Faust for ENO, which won the Southbank Sky Arts 2012 opera award.
her perform an acclaimed European tour of Boulez’s *Pli selon pli* conducted by the composer, culminating in a concert at London’s Southbank Centre as part of their ‘Exquisite Labyrinth’ festival.

Born and brought up in Canada, Barbara Hannigan received her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the University of Toronto, studying with Mary Morrison, and continued her studies at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague with Meinard Kraak and privately with Neil Semer.

**Bejun Mehta**

“Bejun Mehta is arguably the best countertenor in the world today” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung, Michael Stollnicht, Aug/2012*). He appears in leading roles in the most prestigious opera houses and festivals including the ROH Covent Garden, Bayerische Staatsoper, Opéra National and Théâtre du Chatelet in Paris, Theater an der Wien, the Berliner Staatsoper, Théâtre de la Monnaie, Netherlands Opera, the Barcelona Liceu, the Teatro Real in Madrid, the Metropolitan Opera, the Chicago Lyric, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City Operas, the Salzburg Festival, Glyndebourne, Edinburgh, Aix-en-Provence, Verbier, and the London BBC Proms. His orchestral concert work and recital partnership with pianist Julius Drake, in adventurous programs ranging from the Baroque to contemporary music, have been presented by the world’s leading concert venues including the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Wiener Konzerthaus, Brussels’ Palais des Beaux Arts, the Wigmore Hall, Munich’s Prinzregententheater and Cuvilliés-Theater, Salzburg’s Mozarteum, Carnegie Hall, Zankel Hall, the 92nd Street Y, the Palau des Arts Valencia, Teatro de la Zarzuela Ciclo de Lied in Madrid, and the Cité de la Musique in Paris.

Bejun Mehta records for Harmonia Mundi. His Handel aria album *Ombra Cara*, with the Freiburger Barock Orchester conducted by René Jacobs, was awarded the 2011 ECHO Klassik Prize in the category ‘Opera Recording of the Year’. His next solo CD, *Down By The Salley Gardens*, a program of English romantic songs, was released in November 2011. Mr. Mehta sings Ottone on

**George Benjamin**

Born in 1960, George Benjamin is one of the outstanding composers of his generation. He 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 concluded his studies at King’s College Cambridge under Alexander Goehr.

His first orchestral work, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, was played at the BBC Proms when he was just 20; from the first it achieved a remarkable international performance record, as did 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 *Three Inventions for Chamber Orchestra* was written for the opening of the 75th Salzburg Festival in 1995.

The London Symphony Orchestra and Pierre Boulez gave the world premiere of *Palimpsests* in 2002 to mark the opening of ‘By George’, the LSO’s season-long portrait of his work at the Barbican. Recent years have seen numerous retrospectives of his work, including Madrid, Berlin, Paris, Lucerne, London, Aldeburgh and Frankfurt.

The centre point of a portrait at the 2006 Festival d’Automne in Paris was his first operatic work, *Into the Little Hill*, a collaboration with the playwright Martin Crimp, which has toured widely across the world since its premiere. Their second collaboration, *Written on Skin*, which premiered in July 2012 and is scheduled to be performed in over a dozen opera houses across the world.
As a conductor he regularly appears with some of the world’s leading ensembles and orchestras, amongst them the London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia, and Concertgebouw orchestras and the Berlin Philharmonic. He has conducted numerous world premieres, including important works by Rihm, Chin, Grisey and Ligeti and his repertoire stretches from Schumann and Wagner to Knussen, Abrahamsen and Murali.

In January 2010 there were extensive celebrations marking Benjamin’s 50th birthday given by the San Francisco Symphony and London Sinfonietta, and in May 2012 the Southbank Centre, London presented a retrospective of his work as part of the UK’s Cultural Olympiad. He has built up a close relationship with the Tanglewood festival in America and has returned there frequently since his first appearance in 1999. He lives in London, and since 2001 has been the Henry Purcell Professor of Composition at King’s College, London.

Martin Crimp


Barbara Hannigan

The soprano Barbara Hannigan possesses a vital stage presence, whether in opera or on the concert platform. Much sought after in contemporary music - she has given over 75 world premieres - she is no less brilliant and devoted a performer of Baroque and Classical music. Bringing freshness to older music and authority to new, she is among the very few singers whose every performance is an occasion.

A frequent guest of the Berliner Philharmoniker, she has also performed with most of the other leading orchestras and ensembles worldwide, and with such conductors as Sir Simon Rattle, Pierre Boulez, Reindert de Leeuw, Vladimir Jurowski, Kirill Petrenko, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kurt Masur, Alan Gilbert, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Pablo Heras-Casado and Susanna Mälkki. She made her own conducting debut at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, with Stravinsky’s Renard.

Her operatic repertoire includes Ligeti’s Le Grand Macabre (Gepopo and Venus), Handel’s Rinaldo (Armida) and Ariodante (Dalinda). Her appearances in Sasha Waltz’s productions of Passion and Matsukaze, requiring physical as well as vocal agility and expressive potency, made an extraordinary impression. Mysteries of the Macabre, a tour de force for soprano and orchestra, has become a signature work, which she has sung - and sometimes also conducted - at New York’s Lincoln Center, the Berlin Philharmonie, Théâtre du Châtelet, Salzburger Festspiele, Los Angeles’ Disney Hall, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and the Vienna Konzerthaus.

Barbara Hannigan’s sovereign mastery of music of so many different genres and periods is grounded in intensive research, and decades of study. Her talent for programming has also been widely recognised, evident in her upcoming Major Partnership with Southbank Centre’s innovative festival ‘The Rest is Noise’, based on Alex Ross’s seminal book of the same name.

Recent and upcoming performances include debuts at the Teatro Liceu in Barcelona and the Royal Opera House, as well as a role debut as Berg’s Lulu at La Monnaie in 2012. Last season saw...
Written on Skin

Music by GEORGE BENJAMIN

Text by MARTIN CRIMP

THE PROTECTOR   Christopher Purves
AGNÉS his wife  Barbara Hannigan
ANGEL 1 / THE BOY Bejun Mehta
ANGEL 2 / MARIE  Rebecca Jo Loeb
ANGEL 3 / JOHN   Allan Clayton

Serge Martin, Le Soir

George Benjamin has written nothing better...and that’s saying something. Richard Morrison, The Times

Duet for Piano & Orchestra

Soloist, Pierre-Laurent Aimard

Playing time 90.38

Bejun Mehta appears courtesy of harmonia mundi

Pierre-Laurent Aimard appears courtesy of Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft

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