



IAN STEPHENS
CHAMBER MUSIC

FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET
MANDY BURVILL CLARINET
JONATHAN SMALL OBOE

IAN STEPHENS: CHAMBER MUSIC

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9.	II. Heartfelt	4:40
10.	III. With abandon	3:59
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11.	I. Senza misura – Agitato – Vivace	7:24
12.	II. Passacaglia	7:53
13.	III. Molto vivace – Adagio – Molto vivace	7:43

Total playing time 74:28



Ian Stephens - Photo by Charlie Clark

IAN STEPHENS (b.1974)

Ian Stephens is known as a composer and an arranger, but in his hands the two disciplines often seem one and the same. He has a rare ability to let musical material speak for itself, whether it originated inside him or elsewhere, amplifying it when useful and distilling it where appropriate. His own melodies are often possessed of the clarity and lyricism of folk music, while his work across the board betrays something of Aaron Copland's prized ability to keep instruments 'out of each other's way'.

Stephens was raised in Sidmouth, Devon as a cellist and a singer, studying music to postgraduate level at the University of Bristol. After graduating, he spent time working as an editor on the New Grove Dictionary of Music and lecturing in music at the University of Liverpool, at the same time beginning a longstanding relationship with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He now teaches at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester and remains an active composer, performer, workshop leader and choir director.

Stephens's music has been performed by the RLPO as well as by the Hallé Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, the Brodsky and Fitzwilliam Quartets and the Choir of King's College, Cambridge. A new full-length ballet *Ella's Big Chance: A Jazz Age Cinderella* premieres in London in 2025. His ballet *Pinocchio* was first performed by Northern Ballet in 2021 and his children's entertainment *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* was performed at the 2013 BBC Proms.

Like those pieces, the works on this recording underline Stephens's ability to elevate melody and lyricism while proving unafraid to gently disrupt, provoke or re-contextualise them – often deploying a trademark strong rhythmic profile, theatrical clarity and appreciation for moments of relish or surprise. *Celtic Elegy* for cello and clarinet demonstrates soul and efficiency in equal measure as it unobtrusively upholds an original melody, suggesting why the likes of Cate Le Bon, Ian Broudie, OMD and The Bootleg Beatles have all tapped Stephens's abilities as an arranger.

Springhead Echoes for string quartet is characterized by an expressivity that plumbs deep while avoiding sentiment. It does so by being rooted in strong rhythms, simple intervals and open harmonies – all of which are allowed to weave their way into the sort of delicate yet rigorous counterpoint that can be heard in much of the composer's works. The *Clarinet Quintet* demonstrates Stephens's tendency to inhabit the natural characteristics of an instrument while again indulging his own gift for lyricism, here in combination with twisting modality.

The latter quality is also evident in the *Oboe Quintet*, commissioned by Liverpool's longstanding Rodewald Concert Society. The work is one of long-breathed lyricism punctuated by joyous dances – whether in the ragged rhythms of the 'agitato' opening movement, the grooving passacaglia that follows or the vivacious finale full of joy. The work is framed by poignant soliloquies for the oboe.

In the string quartet *North Country* we are effectively hearing Stephens as both composer and arranger. The aerated atmosphere pervades all three clear-sighted movements – 'Lilting', 'Heartfelt' and 'With Abandon' – that trace the shape of the folk song *The Oak and the Ash*. The tune is allowed to blossom through these three dances towards a final, florid tango that disintegrates before momentarily and theatrically springing back to life.

Profile by Andrew Mellor © 2024

www.ianstephens.net

ALAN GEORGE ON IAN STEPHENS

“Rarely has any composer presented us with music so inherently idiomatic: of all the 60 or so new works we have premiered, not one has more thoroughly and emphatically been conceived out of the medium for which it was designed. In his hands the string quartet is allowed to breathe, blossom, and resonate; and he is inherently alive to all the shades, nuances, and colours of which four stringed instruments – and a clarinet – are capable ... In addition to these great virtues, he is also an expert craftsman, with a natural grasp of form and harmony – he has a particularly strong sense of movement, of evolving from slow music to/from high speed with no effort at all, almost as if superimposed. But above all, there is the emotional impact these pieces made: not only on the exceptionally attentive audience assembled, but on the four of us too.”

(Alan George, Fitzwilliam String Quartet)



From the first violin part of the *Clarinet Quintet* © Yusef Bastawy

PROGRAMME NOTES

Celtic Elegy

clarinet and cello

Celtic Elegy is my homage to the music of the Celtic lands. I wrote it in 2002 for clarinetist Mandy Burvill (full disclosure – we are married!) and the cellist Joanna Lander. I'd recently come across the Irish slow air 'She moved through the fair' and this tune became the embarkation point for my own melody. The accompaniment keeps the Celtic theme, with drones and ornamentation inspired by Scottish bagpipes. *Celtic Elegy* is the middle movement of *Three Miniatures* for clarinet and cello.

Two linked pieces:

Springhead Echoes & Clarinet Quintet

I was among a group of musicians who in 1999 were invited to join Rosalind Richards at her home in Springhead, Fontmell Magna, Dorset for chamber music. We played Schubert's *Octet*, with Rosalind leading – she was a keen and able violinist – Mandy playing the clarinet, and me playing double bass. The wonderfully situated Springhead was the house in which she was born and with which she was linked for her entire life.

Soon after Rosalind's death in 2016 I was commissioned by her three daughters to commemorate the lives of both of their parents in two works, which became *Springhead Echoes* and the *Clarinet Quintet*. Both pieces were first performed by the Fitzwilliam Quartet in London in November 2018, with Mandy joining them for the *Clarinet Quintet*. Here Alan George, the Fitzwilliam's viola player, explains the Quartet's long connection with Rosalind and Brian:

"I'd known Rosalind (1938-2016) and Brian (1934-2003) since the early 1970s, when the Fitzwilliam was Resident Quartet at York University. They lived in Skelton Hall, just

north of the city; and it was Brian I probably met first, since our second violinist's fiancée was a staff nurse working under this eminent urologist at what was then York County Hospital. He was also an accomplished clarinetist (born into a distinguished musical dynasty), Rosalind an equally fine violinist – both of them highly respected around the York amateur music scene. Rosalind – being a member of the Gardiner family (sister of Sir John Eliot) – gathered a reputation for being a somewhat formidable presence! – as opposed to Brian's milder, more gentle manner. Yet 'Tozzie' was no less lovable, generous, and welcoming. In 1996 she went back to live in the original family seat: Springhead (near Shaftesbury) is a restored thatched mill with the most wonderful garden and mill lake, nestling beneath Cranborne Chase. We gave concerts in the Mill Room nearly every year from 2000, until Alzheimer's severely impaired Rosalind's great powers of organisation. Thereafter Lucy Russell and I visited a few times to play music with her – on the last occasion powering us through (at great speed!) some favourite dances by her hero (and ours), Henry Purcell. Never to be forgotten."

Springhead Echoes

string quartet

I Tranquillo – Con moto

II Vivo

III Adagio

The first of the two linked pieces is *Springhead Echoes* (2017), written in memory of Rosalind Richards. I asked Rosalind's daughter Polly if there were any particular favourite pieces of Rosalind's to which I could allude in *Springhead Echoes*, and from the resulting list I chose Brahms's *Violin Sonata No.1 in G major*. Each of the three contrasting movements incorporates an idea derived – by a variety of means – from the Brahms Sonata.

Springhead Echoes opens with a spacious Brahms-derived theme, vacillating between minor and major, before launching into the energetic *Con moto* that sustains its energy for



From Ian's sketches for *Springhead Echoes* © Ian Stephens

much of the rest of the first movement. A chorale-like *Semplice* episode, drawing on the underlying harmonies at the opening of the Brahms first movement, forms the still heart of the movement, and brings it to a close.

The flashing, jig-like framing theme of the second movement has its source in alternate notes of the second theme of the Brahms first movement, while the central section sets a polyrhythmic *pizzicato* pattern against an improvisatory melody.

The finale returns to further explore the first theme of the Brahms with an expressive melody, and hints at a harmony from Brahms's second movement. The final piece of the jigsaw is a delicate, glassy theme based on Rosalind's unusual middle name, Mariabella.

Clarinet Quintet

clarinet and string quartet

I Con moto

II Agitato

III Andante

Written in 2017 in memory of Brian Richards, this is the second of the two linked pieces. Again I asked his daughters if there were any pieces that Brian particularly loved, and from the many choices I selected the Prisoners' Chorus, 'O welche Lust', from Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*. The words are telling:

Oh what joy, in the open air

Freely to breathe again!

Up here alone is life!

The dungeon is a grave.

There is a poignancy to the last line quoted here, reflecting Brian's later struggle with Parkinson's and how it constrained his ability to express his personality – his energy, sense of fun and love of wordplay – and his participation in chamber music.

Elements from ‘O welche Lust’ find their way into each movement, but particularly the central episode of the second movement. Twice in the *Clarinet Quintet* the opening theme of Brahms’s *Violin Sonata No. 1* – the shadow piece behind *Springhead Echoes* – is quietly intoned, thus drawing together the two pieces.

Energetic themes are coupled with passionate lyricism in the first movement’s framing sections; there’s an accompanied clarinet cadenza towards the end.

The second movement is structured in arch form, with a counterpoint to ‘O welche lust’ gradually revealed until the Beethoven theme is heard at the movement’s heart. It then fragments, receding into rhythmic and harmonic darkness.

The last movement celebrates the clarinet with a long-breathed, soaring melody. I wrote it for Mandy, who plays it so beautifully.



From the *Clarinet Quintet* recording sessions © Yusef Bastaw

North Country

string quartet

I Liltng

II Heartfelt

III With abandon

I composed *North Country* in January 2021, in response to a commission from Paul Bryant, a retired orthopaedic surgeon who has made a number of stringed instruments – including the four instruments of a string quartet – in recent years. This commission came about through a mutual friend, Helen Dodd, who suggested that he should have a new piece of music to celebrate the completion of his quartet of instruments.

Helen put us in touch, and we agreed on a plan: a new piece of about 12 minutes duration in three movements, interwoven throughout with references to the northern English folk tune ‘The Oak and the Ash’. This tune is a great favourite of mine – I love its sudden changes of character – and it proved fertile inspiration for the three movements. Here is the text of its first verse:

*A North Country maid up to London had strayed,
Although with her nature it did not agree.
She wept and she sighed, and so bitterly she cried,
“How I wish once again in the North I could be!
Oh the oak and the ash, and the bonny ivy tree,
They flourish at home in my own country.”*

The first movement, marked *Lilting*, has something of the character of a Scots slow air. It’s built around the melody of ‘The Oak and the Ash’, but transposed to a pentatonic scale, which gives it an open-air, folk-like quality.

Marked *Heartfelt*, the second movement grows from a rich reharmonisation of an 8-note segment of ‘The Oak and the Ash’. At the centre of the movement is a jaunty and irregular

dance-like episode, this time based on an inverted version of the full tune. The movement closes with a return to an extended and more passionate version of its opening material.

The third movement, marked *With abandon*, draws on Latin-American rhythms, and is structured like a canon, with successive entries of the same material. After entries from first violin, second violin and viola, the full tune of 'The Oak and the Ash' appears in recognisable form. The tune gradually recedes, and though the movement appears to be fading into the distance, beware of a little sting in the tail.

Paul dedicates *North Country* to his wife Vicky. It was first performed by the Chapel Street Ensemble on Paul Bryant's instruments in Penzance, 2021.

Oboe Quintet

oboe and string quartet

I Senza misura – Agitato – Vivace

II Passacaglia

III Molto vivace – Adagio – Molto vivace

I composed the *Oboe Quintet* in 2014 to a commission from the Liverpool-based Rodewald Concert Society; the commission was prompted by the deaths of two former committee members, David Dutch and Monica Nurnberg. Both were oboists, and both were important figures in Liverpool's amateur music scene. They are the joint dedicatees of this piece.

David was a founder of the Liverpool Mozart Orchestra and Merseyside Youth Orchestra (now the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra). As well as the oboe and cor anglais, he played the viola in later years. I had the pleasure of playing alongside him in the Crosby Symphony Orchestra, the Wirral Symphony Orchestra and in string quartets on occasion. Monica was a founder member of the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral Orchestra and took a leading role in running it for many years. Both were regular participants in orchestras and chamber groups across the region.

The piece is in three movements. One theme, a melody which grows from a falling minor third, heard at the very opening on the oboe, is central to the two outer movements.

A free introductory statement on the oboe opens the Quintet. At the *Agitato* entry of the strings, another element central to this movement is presented: a rising chain of symmetrically-constructed chords. After a brief return to the first theme, a *Vivace* section begins. Mainly in a lopsided 7/4 rhythm, it builds in intensity before relaxing into a calm, seemingly improvised duo between oboe and first violin, over a silvery chord on high harmonics. After a climactic section, the *Vivace* material returns; the movement ends with the cello rising higher and higher, finally passing the melody to the oboe.

I contacted the families of both dedicatees and asked them to let me know some of the dedicatees' favourite bits of oboe music, to which I could allude in writing the Quintet. I settled on *Ich habe genug* (I have enough), a cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach with a prominent oboe part. The chords which underpin the first section of *Ich habe genug* form the framework of the Passacaglia second movement. The movement is in seven sections, with each section in a different time signature, though the bar-length stays identical throughout. In each section the Bach-derived theme is used in a different way. The final section is built from half-heard fragments of Bach's music.

The finale is mainly quick. Marked *Molto vivace*, the opening statement sets up a dialogue between a striving oboe melody and an off-kilter chorale in the strings. This leads into a wild folk-inflected dance section with a driving yet unpredictable rhythm. At the core of the movement is an expressive *Adagio*. The oboe is left alone to end the Quintet in rhapsodic flight.

The *Oboe Quintet* was first performed by Jonathan Small and the Brodsky Quartet in Liverpool in 2014.

Programme notes by Ian Stephens © 2024

FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET

Lucy Russell violin

Andrew Roberts violin

Alan George viola

Heather Tuach / Ursula Smith cello

The original members of the Fitzwilliam String Quartet first sat down together, at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge, in October 1968 – as undergraduates during their inaugural term. Their first concert appearance took place in Churchill College the following March, ahead of their public debut at the Sheffield Arts Festival in June – making the Fitzwilliam now one of the longest established string quartets in the world, and almost unique in having passed a half-century with an original player still on board (but latterly joined by the Chilingirian, Brodsky, and Coull Quartets – with our congratulations!).

The present line-up combines founding member Alan George with a younger generation of performers: violinists Lucy Russell (herself celebrating 35 years in the group) and Andrew Roberts (son of the great pianist Bernard), along with former Zehetmair Quartet cellist Ursula Smith – who has also led a highly distinguished career as principal cello in various groups, including the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

International recognition came early for the FSQ, as the first group to record and perform all 15 Shostakovich string quartets, drawing on the players' personal connection with the composer: he travelled to York to hear their performance of his 13th quartet, and this musical friendship (the composer's own word!) prospered through correspondence, and the presentation of his final two quartets – written in the years immediately following that visit. Sadly, a carefully planned trip to spend a week with him in Moscow was necessarily abandoned, following his death in August 1975. Benjamin Britten afterwards reported that his friend had told him the Fitzwilliam were his "preferred performers of my quartets"! Whilst their pre-eminence in the interpretation of Shostakovich has persisted,

the authority gained has been put at the service of diverse other composers spanning six centuries, from the mid-16th to the present day.

The quartet has appeared regularly across the UK, Europe, North America, the Middle and Far East, and Southern Africa, as well as making many award winning recordings for Decca, Linn, and Divine Art. A long-term ambition to record Beethoven and Schubert on gut strings – following the success of previous discs on historical instruments – was finally initiated during their 50th anniversary season, with recordings of Schubert's last four quartets; Beethoven's Opp.131 and 135 went under the red light three weeks after two of the works on the enclosed recording! Thus does the Fitzwilliam remain one of the few prominent quartets to play on older set-ups, yet simultaneously bringing about the addition of over 60 new works to the repertoire – as can be heard here, and on perhaps their most novel disc so far: a jazz-fusion collaboration with German saxophonist/composer Uwe Steinmetz and former Turtle Island Quartet violinist Mads Tolling.

After graduating from Cambridge in 1971 they immediately embarked on their first professional appointment, succeeding the celebrated Amadeus Quartet at the University of York. From there, the group built a niche for itself in concert venues around Yorkshire and the rest of the UK, at the same time joining a select company of aspiring quartets to have emerged under the guidance of Sidney Griller at the Royal Academy of Music. Having been Quartet-in-Residence at York for twelve years, at Warwick for three, at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge from 1998 to 2020, and at Bucknell (Pennsylvania, USA) since 1978, their university work now continues at Clare Hall Cambridge and at St Andrews – where they have become increasingly involved in working with the University Opera and the Chamber Orchestra. The quartet is very proud to have been granted its own annual chamber music festival in the famous “book town” of Hay-on-Wye.

fitzwilliamquartet.com



Fitzwilliam String Quartet with Ursula Smith, cello © Peter Searle

Mandy Burvill
clarinet

Mandy studied at Trinity College of Music, London, with Keith Puddy and Hale Hambleton, and subsequently spent 10 years as 2nd and E flat clarinet in the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. She is currently pursuing a varied freelance career, working regularly as guest principal with orchestras including the Hallé, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Manchester Camerata and Northern Ballet.

Mandy has always been interested in breaking down barriers in classical music and, since leaving the RLPO, she has particularly enjoyed being able to focus more on outreach work, bringing music to spaces other than concert halls, and making music in a more intimate way with smaller audiences. She has been heavily involved in the RLPO and Mersey Care's award-winning Musician in Residence programme, leading weekly sessions with adults and older people with mental health problems, dementia, learning disabilities and brain injury. Mandy has completed a Masters in Psychology for Musicians and, more recently, a Masters in Counselling and Psychotherapy where she researched musician authenticity.

She has taught at the Royal Northern College of Music, Leeds College of Music, the University of Manchester and the University of Liverpool, and enjoys coaching on chamber music courses and summer schools.



Photo @ Adam Shawyer

Mandy has made numerous concerto appearances around the UK with orchestras including Manchester Camerata and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra; she gave the second British performance of the virtuosic clarinet concerto by Magnus Lindberg, as well as premiering Ian Stephens's Clarinet Concerto, written for her in 2019.

Jonathan Small oboe

Jonathan Small played as principal oboist and soloist with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra from 1984 to 2024. He has been senior tutor of oboe at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, since 1991, and enjoys a seasoned reputation as a highly individual artist, whose eloquent, inspired playing combines individuality with unceasing scholarship.

His aspirations as an oboist stem from the expressive flexibility of the English tradition, as represented by artists such as Roger Lord and Michael Winfield (with whom Jonathan studied at the Royal College of Music, London), blended with the special richness and vitality of the German school as exemplified by the Berlin Philharmonic's legendary Lothar Koch. Jonathan plays on instruments made by J. Püchner of Nauheim, Germany.

BBC Radio 3's *CD Review* selected Jonathan's performance of the Richard Strauss Oboe Concerto (RLPO / Gerard Schwarz) as the recommended recording following a rigorous selection from over 30 recordings dating from 1947 to the most recent. Jonathan's world-class EMI performance of the Vaughan Williams Concerto (RLPO / Vernon Handley) retains similar status.

Jonathan has always been active in contemporary music, with Glasgow's Paragon Ensemble, and Liverpool Philharmonic's Ensemble 10:10. He has premiered solo oboe works by Rodion Shchedrin, Haim Permont, John Maxwell Geddes, Mark Simpson and Michael Small, as well as Ian Stephens. Jonathan's many solo appearances abroad



Photo @ Gareth Jones

include invitations to the Czech Republic, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, USA and Australia.

Jonathan was appointed Guest Professor of Oboe at Beijing Central Conservatory in 2004 and has been teaching regularly in China since 2001 following invitations to Beijing, Chengdu and Kunming. He has tutored many Chinese students over the years both in China and at the RNCM.

Since 2005 Jonathan has developed a parallel career as a conductor. He has conducted concerts with the RLPO, Kuopio Symphony Orchestra, Finland, Helsingborg Symphony and Musica Vitae Chamber Orchestra in Sweden, and over 100 concerts with his own Wirral Symphony Orchestra.

jonathansmalloboe.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, a huge thanks to the wonderful musicians on this album: Lucy, Andrew, Alan, Heather, Ursula, Jonathan, and especially Mandy, who is my partner in life and music, my rock and my muse. I am so honoured to have you all on this recording. And to Simon Callaghan, whose expertise, musicianship and calm professionalism made the recording sessions run like a well-oiled machine.

Commissioning is a vital element of a healthy music culture, and I'd like to offer sincere thanks to those who commissioned the music on this album – Polly Richards, Tif Loehnis, Corinna Pyman, Paul Bryant, and the Rodewald Concert Society – and to all others who have commissioned music from me over the years.

Thanks also to all my teachers, to those who have inspired me, and to my students, who keep me very much in the present.

And the album really could not have happened without all those who have so generously supported this recording. Many supported through Kickstarter, many others independently. I'm hugely grateful to you all.

Champions

Vivienne & Trevor Burvill
Carson Cooman
Jackie Hutchison
Sue McClaughry
Eleanor Steinitz
Helen & Nick Stephens

Patrons

Miriam Alcock
Helen Dodd
Belinda Dutch
Simon Hutchison
Eva Jacobs
Keith Maries
Andrew McCluskey
Clark Rundell
Vicky Simons
Jonathan Small
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Sponsors

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William Stephens
Jonny & Gillian Stone
Helen Thomas
Matthew Webb
Ann Wiggins
Howard Williams
Alice Young & Jeremy James

And many other anonymous contributors

Celtic Elegy

Mandy Burvill (clarinet), Heather Tuach (cello)

Springhead Echoes

Lucy Russell (violin), Andrew Roberts (violin), Alan George (viola), Heather Tuach (cello)

Clarinet Quintet

Mandy Burvill (clarinet), Lucy Russell (violin), Andrew Roberts (violin), Alan George (viola), Heather Tuach (cello)

North Country

Lucy Russell (violin), Andrew Roberts (violin), Alan George (viola), Ursula Smith (cello)

Oboe Quintet

Jonathan Small (oboe), Lucy Russell (violin), Andrew Roberts (violin), Alan George (viola), Ursula Smith (cello)



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