



métier

HOMAGE

chamber music by

Philip Grange

Gemini

Ian Mitchell director

HOMAGE

Philip Grange (b.1956)

1. ***Tiers of Time*** 8:47
(piano, violin, viola, cello)

2. ***Elegy*** 9:50
(cello)

Piano Trio: *Homage to Chagall* 21:40

3. *Moderato* 6:23

4. *Scherzo: Sempre leggiermente* 2:50

5. *Adagio* 6:55

6. *Con fuoco* 5:32
(piano, violin, cello)

Shifting Thresholds 30:52

7. *Largo – Molto allegro* 6:32

8. Movement in shifting tempi 7:02

9. *Quasi recitativo* – (J= 48) – coda 5:35

10. Movement in shifting tempi 11:42
(flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, violin, cello, conductor)

Total duration 71:25

All works performed by

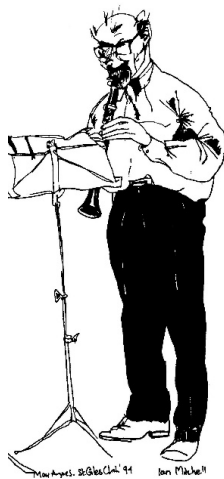
Gemini

Foreword by Ian Mitchell

Gemini and Philip Grange have had an association going back nearly thirty years, developing more closely when Grange and I were both on the staff at the University of Exeter, from the mid-1990s, and where Gemini became Ensemble-in-Association for eleven years. The association has included three commissions: *Des fins sont des commencements* (1994) written for a national tour to mark the 60th birthday of Grange's teacher and close friend, Peter Maxwell Davies; *A Puzzle of Shadows* (1997) and *Shifting Thresholds* originally discussed in the early two thousands, which came to fruition when both the composer and I had space for it, spurred on by Gemini's desire to mark Grange's 60th birthday in 2016.

We have also recorded two CDs of his chamber music before this one: *Dark Labyrinths* released by Black Box in 2000 and *Darkness Visible* in 2006 on the Métier label. Both were a Critic's Choice of the Year in Gramophone magazine. In addition, Gemini has given around thirty performances of various works, toured the UK and, memorably, Taiwan with the composer. So, it was with enormous pleasure that I said yes when Philip said he would like to record *Shifting Thresholds* – the major chamber work of just over 30 minutes in length that he wrote for Gemini to premiere in his 60th birthday concert at the University of Manchester in December 2016.

It is a fascinating work that includes elements new to his compositional palette, and perhaps surprising for others to discover. As he writes in his commentary, the work is inspired by Samuel Beckett's extraordinary novel *Malone Dies* and, as I have written elsewhere, familiarity with the score shows things absorbed: passing moments of absolute



stillness found in Beckett and in music by Morton Feldman, a close friend of Beckett; there often appears to be less of a sense of narrative driving the music forward in a typical Grange way, and more of a Beckettian reflective exploration of material in different contexts or from different angles, sometimes as if half forgotten, perhaps – at times the music revolving more than marching onwards towards a goal. Indeed, there is in essence no goal, the music apparently heading to a climax only to distort and fall apart, struggling to continue and finally expiring ... There are also some novel (for Grange) instrumental techniques used in passing such as multiphonics for the bass clarinet (multiple sounds produced simultaneously) and quarter tones for strings.

All four works on the disc pay homage not just in name, but more deeply through Grange exploring and assimilating elements of each artist's work, shining his own light on them by absorbing these elements into his own language.

As ever with Phil, it has been a highly stimulating project to work on, the fruits of which we are pleased and eager to share widely.

Ian Mitchell, Director, Gemini



*Philip Grange and
David Lefeber*

Commentary by Philip Grange

Following the premiere of *Shifting Thresholds* in December 2016 I realised that I had not only written a work which was informed by aspects of Samuel Beckett's writing, but also one that paid homage to his work; indeed, it occurred to me that many of my compositions constituted such acts of homage. This CD explores this aspect of my oeuvre in pieces informed by the work of a fellow composer (*Tiers of Time*), a painter (Piano Trio) and two writers (*Elegy* and *Shifting Thresholds*).

Tiers of Time was written in 2007 for a concert given to mark the retirement from Manchester University of my friend and colleague, composer John Casken. For a while John and I both lived in Whaley Bridge in the Peak District and this work was inspired by the landscape of the area – the desolate, gloomy moorlands and the breathtaking vistas often illuminated by powerful sunlight. The title refers to the geological strata that are apparent in many of the peaks, and which inspired the stratified textures employed in the piece. The material for the work is taken from the final bars of John's own Piano Quartet – a work I have always admired. In fact, *Tiers of Time* ends with a much-altered quotation of John's own work: in essence, I work towards a statement of the same musical landscape but view it differently.

Elegy for solo cello was written following a visit to the grave of the poet Edward Thomas (1878–1917) in the French village of Agny. I have long admired Thomas' poems and have set many of them. For me his death at the battle of Arras in 1917 is emblematic of the loss of human potential caused by conflicts such as World War I. The work reflects on this in taking the form of an extended line which undergoes various dramatic transformations until it arrives at a resigned conclusion.

The subtitle of the Piano Trio makes its act of homage clear, and whilst the third movement does reflect individual paintings by Chagall (it was inspired by *Solitude* of 1933 and *War* of 1964–66), the work is more concerned with analogies for Chagall's output as a whole. One manifestation of this is the way in which the piece employs musical ideas which dominate one section or movement, but which appear more

marginal in subsequent contexts. This is analogous to Chagall's use of a large, but nonetheless limited number of images, one of which might provide the focus of a particular painting, while appearing as peripheral in another. This approach results in much cross-referencing between the Trio's four movements. These comprise an opening *moderato* containing episodes linked by cello recitatives, a fast, muted *scherzo*, a slow threnody and a finale that brings together various elements of the other movements.



My interest in Edward Thomas dates from the early 1970s, the same time as I became interested in Samuel Beckett. However, unlike with Thomas, any compositional reflection of this interest lay dormant until a few years ago. This was when I discovered that one of the primary motivations for the invention of stream of consciousness in novels was the desire by certain nineteenth-century French writers to find a literary equivalence for Wagner's "endless melody".

I was drawn to reverse this dialogue between the arts by composing a piece based on a novel employing stream of consciousness. This led me to Beckett's 1951 novel *Malone Dies*, which I have known for some 45 years.

Beckett's work concerns someone on the verge of dying who invents stories to keep himself entertained. By analogy *Shifting Thresholds* has sections dominated by melodic threads that are interrupted by episodes which are more wide-ranging in terms of tempo and instrumentation, thereby reflecting the nature of some of Malone's stories. In addition, just as Beckett's central character's train of thought is discontinuous, so *Shifting Thresholds* is divided into four movements.

The title, *Shifting Thresholds*, is taken from a poem by Beckett:

*my peace is there in the receding mist
when I may cease from treading these long shifting thresholds**

It is designed to reflect the way in which the music on occasion oscillates between two pitches or chords as if poised on a shifting threshold.

On another level *Shifting Thresholds* is also a homage to the ensemble Gemini and their director Ian Mitchell, with whom I have collaborated extensively over close to 30 years. It is my third commission from the group, and as such its demands reflect my long-held admiration for their extraordinary capacity as performers to communicate not only the music but also the ideas that inform it.

* 'my way is in the sand flowing', 1948

Philip Grange 2019

The music

Tiers of Time (2007)

Gemini: Caroline Balding, violin; Rose Redgrave, viola; Sophie Harris, cello; Aleksander Szram, piano

The first performance was given by Psappha in the Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall, University of Manchester on 25 January 2008. This is the premiere recording.

Elegy (2009)

Sophie Harris, solo cello

The work was written for Lionel Handy who gave the first performance on 8 October 2009 at The Warehouse, London. This is the premiere recording.

Piano Trio: Homage to Chagall (1995)

1. *Moderato* 2. *Scherzo: Sempre leggiermente* 3. *Adagio* 4. *Con fuoco*

Gemini: Caroline Balding, violin; Sophie Harris, cello; Aleksander Szram, piano

The first performance was given at Bude Music Club on 19 October 1995 by The Chagall Trio who commissioned the work with funds from South West Arts.

Shifting Thresholds (2016)

1. *Largo* (♩ = 48) – *Molto Allegro* (♩ = 144)

2. Movement in shifting tempi (♩ = 48 – 120 – 48 – 72)

3. *Quasi recit.* – (♩ = 48) – coda (♩ = 96)

4. *Largo – sempre leggiermente*; movement in shifting tempi (♩ = 48 – 144 – 48 – 120 – 48 – 72 – 48 – 96)

Gemini: Ileana Ruhemann, flute, piccolo, alto flute; Catriona Scott, clarinets in A and E flat, bass clarinet; Joby Burgess, percussion, tuned percussion; Aleksander Szram, piano; Caroline Balding, violin; Sophie Harris, cello; Ian Mitchell, conductor

The first performance was given by Gemini (who commissioned the work) in the Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall, University of Manchester on 16 December 2016 as part of a sixtieth birthday concert for the composer. This is the premiere recording.

The composer

Philip Grange's earliest published compositions date from the late 1970s and include *Cimmerian Nocturne* (1979). This work was written for The Fires of London, the ensemble directed by Peter Maxwell Davies, and grew out of Grange's studies with Maxwell Davies both privately and at the Dartington Summer School of Music between 1975 and 1981. The group went on to commission *Variations* (1986) which was featured at the International Rostrum of Composers in Paris in 1988. In the 1990s Grange completed two important BBC commissions, *Focus and Fade* (1991/2) for orchestra, and *Lowry Dreamscape* (1992) for brass band. The decade ended with the composition of a Clarinet Concerto for the RNCM Wind Band and Grange's former clarinet teacher Alan



Hacker. Since 2000 his compositions have included the BBC commission *Eclipsing* (2004) for orchestra, and three string quartets, the last of which, *Ghosts of Great Violence* (2012/13), was written for the Danel String Quartet.

Grange's compositions have been performed throughout the world, most recently in festivals in Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, Macau, Belgium, Mexico, Switzerland and the U.S.A. In the UK his work has been performed at most major festivals, including the BBC Proms, Huddersfield, Aldeburgh and Cheltenham. The latter hosted the premiere of his large-scale wind ensemble piece *Cloud Atlas* (2009), which was awarded a BASCA prize in 2010. Grange is currently Professor of Composition at the University of Manchester, a position he has held since 2001.

www.editionpeters.com/composer/grange-philip/w01769

Gemini

Gemini has performed extensively throughout the UK and abroad (Austria, Australia, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Oman, Taiwan); given frequent radio and television broadcasts; has recorded music by Peter Maxwell Davies (Sunday Times Contemporary CD of the Year); John White – *Fashion Music (our tribute to Tchaikovsky Year '93)* (nominated by BBC Music Magazine as a Top Forty CD of the Year); Philip Grange (2 CDs, both chosen as a Critic's Choice of the Year by Gramophone magazine); Nicola LeFanu (2 discs); David Lumsdaine (3 CDs); Geoffrey Poole; Lindsay Cooper; Howard Skempton; Stephen Goss; Camden Reeves; Giles Easterbrook, Tim Ewers and others and recorded Douglas Young's music for the video of Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester*, which has been shown worldwide on television. In May 2013 a DVD of Maxwell Davies's music theatre work *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot* and other works was launched at the Singapore Festival. UK festival appearances include Aldeburgh, Bath, Brighton, Chester, Guildford, Huddersfield, King's Lynn, St Magnus, Spitalfields, Warwick & Leamington; and there have been concerts and workshops abroad for the British Council and others.

The ensemble was a prizewinner in the music category of the Prudential Awards for the Arts and has been the recipient of an Arts Council Incentive Award.

Since its formation in 1973 Gemini has presented a richly varied repertoire, incorporating standard eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chamber music, twentieth-century music, new music, music theatre, music and dance and improvisation, plus much music by neglected composers. Community and school concerts feature music from the eleventh- to the twenty-first century; folk music from around the world, music by children and young people as well as more standard fare.

Gemini was one of the instigators of the festival *Hidden Sounds* – a celebration of women's music – at London's South Bank Centre, out of which grew the influential organization Women in Music.

A pioneer in the field of professional performers in education, with the twin activities of performance and education having developed hand in hand, the ensemble is regularly engaged for residencies combining the two. During these the ensemble helps students and pupils to compose their own music for performance by them and/or Gemini as part of a public concert.

Gemini has been Ensemble-in-Residence at Bristol (2005–13), Surrey (2003–10) and London (Goldsmiths College, 1998–2000) universities, and was Ensemble-in-Association with the Department of Music at the University of Exeter (1996–2007).

www.gemini-ensemble.com www.facebook.com/gemini.ensemble





Sophie Harris



The quartet

Engineer David Lefeber



Ensemble



Acknowledgements

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Details of recordings

17th January, 2019 *Elegy, Tiers of Time, Homage to Chagall*

18th January, 2019 *Shifting Thresholds*

All recordings were made in the presence of the composer at All Saints Church, Franciscan Rd, Tooting, London SW17 8DQ

Tiers of Time, Elegy and Shifting Thresholds are premiere recordings.

Producer and engineer David Lefebvre

Editor Susanne Stanzeleit

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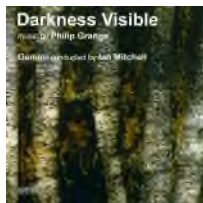


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Philip Grange