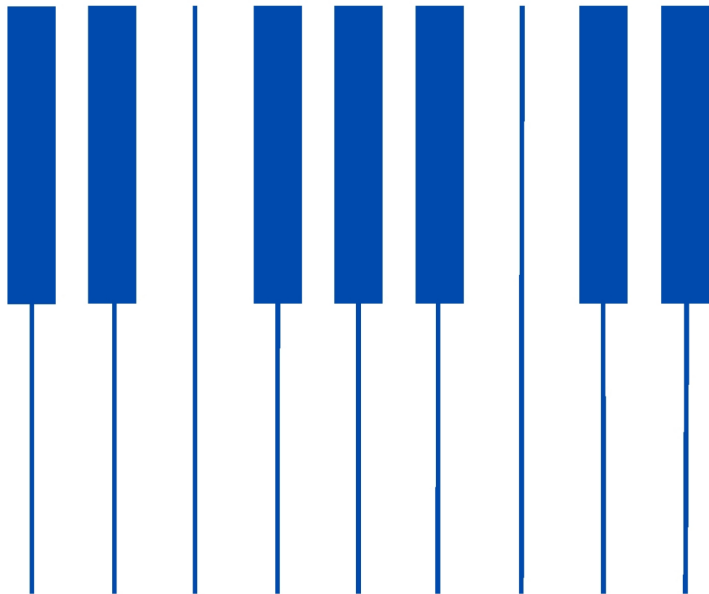


BLUE SOUNDS

CAMDEN REEVES

TOM HICKS (PIANO)



métier

CAMDEN REEVES – BLUE SOUNDS




The piano has been in Camden Reeves's life for as long as he can remember: in fact, from as soon as he could reach the keyboard. With that tactile relationship came a simultaneous urge to compose for the instrument (with 'compositions' at the age of 5, consisting of little other than diminished sevenths). And it all came about thanks to the musical enthusiasms of his grandfather, an amateur jazz pianist. Those enthusiasms were unusually wide-ranging: from the 19th-century romantics, through to the likes of Debussy, Skryabin, Bartók, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, to Bill Evans and Oscar Peterson – a galaxy of harmonic colourists, all of whom left a mark on Reeves's creative instincts.

For a number of years, family disruptions made it impossible for him to pursue piano studies seriously, and even when he resumed, between the ages of 12-16, he was self-taught. At Exeter University, encouraged by his composition teacher

Philip Grange, and inspired by the example of two then-postgraduates – pianist James Clapperton and musicologist Kenneth Gloag – he absorbed the styles of such giants of modernism as Birtwistle, Boulez, Stockhausen, Carter, Ligeti and Xenakis. Although he drew no firm line in his mind between them and his jazz interests at this time, the jazz element in his own music receded for a long while.

All of the above were to become lasting affinities as Reeves voraciously devoured scores and gradually found his own voice, making prize-winning submissions to the Manchester Composers' Platform and the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and drawing inspiration from participation in Peter Maxwell Davies's Hoy Composers' course on a grant from the Prince's Trust – all of these while still an undergraduate. Doctoral studies followed at York with Roger Marsh and David Blake, and at the age of 22 he was appointed as Composition Fellow with the Hallé Orchestra, charged with educational activities. From 2000 he spent a crucial formative year in Helsinki on Erasmus and CIMO scholarships, where Paavo Heininen – teacher of Magnus Lindberg, Kaija Saariaho and others – introduced him to the possibilities of a post-serial technique combined with spectralism, all in the interests of finding greater resonance within a non-tonal universe. This was a powerful catalyst to the project on which he was engaged from 2004-2007: the three-year Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded 'Confronting the Contemporary Piano', carried out at the University of Manchester. He had put paid to his own piano-playing activities by putting his hand through a window, incurring serious nerve damage and as a consequence having to reassess his entire creative relationship to the instrument. He worked on the AHRC project alongside




Richard Casey, pianist with the Psapppha ensemble, looking for ways to emulate the resonance of 19th-century piano repertoire without being bound to its rhetoric. In 2007 he filled a lecturing post opened up at the University by the retirement of John Casken, having already taught various courses there since 2002. He was promoted to Professor in 2016.

As Reeves's personal voice crystallised and matured, so he turned his attention to longer, continuous structures. This was already the case with *Tangle-Beat Blues*. This is a piece marked by extremes of gesture and register – serene, flexible solos set against explosive fistfuls of chords, with tarantella-like ribbons of fast-moving lines mediating and rapid glissandi intervening in the later stages. Protean variants of these textures sustain the invention at a high metabolic rate typical of Reeves's music. Meanwhile his interest in entropy – the tendency of any process, including cosmic ones, to lose energy as it proceeds – underpins the structure at the broadest level, as is evident in the increasingly frequent intervals of silence. Markings such as *lontano* (distant), *lento estaticamento*, and 'bell-like', along with dynamics reduced as far as *pppp*, confirm the move towards tranquillity, and the piece finally balances itself out with solo lines that seem to loop us back to the beginning. The coda is underpinned by the 'Homage à Rameau' from Debussy's *Images* Book 1. As for the title...

I've always loved the Blues. Its influence is everywhere – from all forms of jazz, to British Rock of the 1960s and 1970s, to Gershwin, Ravel and Copland. ... Whilst the blues has been there in my life for as long as I can remember, it's only recently

that I've thought to integrate into what I do. I've always had a profound commitment to Modernism. But that commitment has never been to any ideology, to a set of particular compositional principles or particular composer gurus. My commitment is to the discipline itself – to the idea that music can be more than it has been and that we should aim high. But moving forwards does not mean always moving forwards in the same direction. Forever moving in a straight line can be just as uninteresting as going round in circles. So this piece is a new direction for me; but at the same time one I've instinctively always wanted to try out. So... Tangle-Beat Blues. It's exactly what the title implies. Various Blues-related materials, each in a different but related pulse, are mangled and tangled together. Tangle-Beat Blues was written for Tom Hicks and was first performed by him as part of the Northwest Composers' Festival on 30 October 2013. (Camden Reeves)






The interest in extremes and entropy, and what can be done with them creatively, is by no means confined to *Tangle-Beat Blues*. It can be found perhaps at its most striking in Reeves's 50-minute, single-movement String Quartet No. 3 (2016) composed for the University of Manchester's resident ensemble, the Quatuor Danel. Extremes are a hallmark of his composition teaching too, as a way to force wary students out of their comfort zone of middle-range, middle-brow, middle-everythingness into the exhilarating possibilities of imaginative freedom. It certainly applies to the latest piece on this disc, *Blue Sounds for Piano*, though never in predictable ways. Here a moderate, contemplative opening, abounding with memories (though never quotes) of Debussy and Ravel, and with solo lines that gradually overlap, is suddenly – out of the Blue, we might say – broken up by explosive, rhythmic interventions. As in *Tangle-Beat Blues*, the last word is given to solo lines, with a written-out rubato equally less characteristic of Reeves's piano writing. The piece is a deliberate attempt to step away from the routine chromatic saturation of the Modernist tradition and to explore the kind of disaggregation of line and colour found in the paintings of Matisse and Chagall, forcing the two elements to operate independently.

In 2019 Reeves visited Chicago for a profile concert at the invitation of Tom Hicks. There he saw Chagall's 'America Windows' – a fabulous study in blue, presented by the artist to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1977, an experience further acknowledged in the title of Reeves's recent String Quartet No. 5. At the time this was merely the confirmation of a long-standing fascination. *Blue Sounds for Piano* was the culmination of the collaboration between composer and pianist. And once

again Reeves's programme note best explains his concept:

Blue Sounds is a meditation on a colour. Blue has a special provenance in the arts; just how special became increasingly apparent the more I looked into it. In Renaissance art, blue is the physical incarnation of divinity. For Picasso it became a single point of creative orientation spanning years. In Matisse, we see dark lines in counterpoint with shifting backgrounds of gentle calming blue. Van Gogh uses blue to cast his dark and swirling nocturnal fantasies. For Yves Klein – the conceptual artist par excellence – one single shade, devoid of all form or content, was enough to express everything and nothing. Derek Jarman's Blue (1993), is a meditation on life and death. William H. Gass's On Being Blue: A Philosophical Enquiry is one of the greatest contemplations in prose one can find. But is it possible to hear a colour? In music, 'Blues' is a genre, a scale and a harmonic structure. (Miles Davis's A Kind of Blue, with Bill Evans on piano: is this not the most important Jazz record ever made?) Stockhausen's opera Donnerstag aus Licht – a mythic retelling of cosmic battles between light and dark combined with highly personal childhood reminiscences – is set in blue. Perhaps it is not literally possible to hear a colour, no. But sound is not literal. Vibration is physical. Sound as experience, on the other hand, is psychological. Just as blue reflects beyond what we can see, it likewise resonates beyond what we can hear. This is my kind of blue. Blue Sounds for Piano was commissioned by Tom Hicks, with funds from the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust. (Camden Reeves)

The three pieces on this disc all represent a phase in Reeves's creative output, one



marked by greater fluency, emancipation from dependence on pre-compositional schemes, and an exploratory approach to instrumental sonority, not least to the resonance of the piano, bringing spectral theory to bear on Chopin's textural registration. All three were written for Tom Hicks, spurred initially by hearing him play Stravinsky's *Three Movements from Petrushka* when he was a student, and driven forward by him thereafter. Like *Blue Sounds for Piano*, the Nine Preludes were a commission from Hicks, in this case from soon after his graduation.

My Nine Preludes were written between 2015 and 2016. They began as individual character pieces, but as composition progressed cyclic elements began to emerge. Chopin's 24 Préludes Op. 28 are perhaps my favourite single piece of music by any composer, and his cycle has influenced my own in two principal ways. First, like Chopin's, mine comprise movements of extremes of length – from the very slight to the quite extended. Second, there is a certain openness to the form. Like Chopin's, my Preludes may be played as a complete cycle, in which case the order should be as presented – as small pairs or groups, in which case the order is free, or as individual pieces. The Nine Preludes were premiered by Tom Hicks at the Machynlleth Festival on 22 August 2016. (Camden Reeves)


Liner notes by David Fanning

TOM HICKS



Hailed as an artist of ‘magnificent pianism’ with an ‘engaging personality’, Guernsey-born pianist Tom Hicks has been praised for his ‘brilliantly evocative’ (International Piano) and ‘gorgeously creative playing’ (Fanfare).

Hicks is a gold medallist in competitions including the CGWM Piano Competition, Croydon Piano Concerto Competition, EPTA UK Piano Competition, Evanston & North Shore Scholarship Competition and the Connecticut Young Artist Piano Competition. In addition, he is a recipient of the Gold Medal Award and Peter Frankl Piano Prize from the Royal Northern College of Music; the Faculty of Humanities Outstanding Academic Achievement Award, the Keith Elcombe Prize for Best Overall Performance and three Proctor-Gregg Performance Prizes from the University of Manchester; and the Richards’ Prize for Piano and Musicianship and the Dennis Midwood Keyboard Prize from Chetham’s School of Music.



After lessons in Guernsey with Mervyn Grand, Hicks studied with Murray McLachlan at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester and continued with him on the prestigious Joint Course at The Royal Northern College of Music and The University of Manchester. Since 2015 he has been based in the USA, studying with Boris Berman at Yale University's School of Music and with James Giles at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music, graduating with a Doctorate in Musical Arts in December 2021. He has performed in masterclasses with musicians including Emanuel Ax, Joseph Banowetz, Michel Beroff, Andrea Bonatta, Philippe Cassard, Peter Donohoe, Christopher Elton, Peter Frankl, Stephen Hough, Leslie Howard, Eugen Indjic, Yoheved Kaplinsky, John Lill, Jon Nakamatsu, Steven Osborne, Pascal Rogé, Martin Roscoe, Boris Slutsky, Kathryn Stott, Vladimir Tropp and Simon Trpčeski.

Hicks has an expansive repertoire and has appeared as recitalist in venues such as The Wigmore Hall in London, The Bridgewater Hall in Manchester and in many other venues throughout Europe and the United States. He has appeared as concerto soloist on more than 50 occasions. This includes two complete cycles of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerti.

In 2019, Hicks released a recording of John Ireland and Tchaikovsky, supported by the John Ireland Charitable Trust. The CD has been celebrated by critics writing for magazines including *International Piano*, *Fanfare*, *Piano Journal*, and *Classical Music Daily*. Hicks releases two recordings in 2022: this present album for Métier, which follows premières of Camden Reeves's *Tangle-Beat Blues* in 2014, Nine

Preludes in 2016, and *Blue Sounds for Piano* in 2019, and 'Tom Hicks: Liszt & Ireland Sonatas' for Divine Art.



In 2019, Hicks gave the launch recital as Artistic Director of the Fanny Davies International Piano Series, an ambitious project bringing inspiring masterclasses and recitals to students and audiences in Guernsey.

Hicks is a skilled accompanist and chamber musician and has enjoyed coaching from Boris Berman, Hung-Kuan Chen, Leonard Elschenbroich, Mark Steinberg and Ralph Kirshbaum. Performance highlights include piano quintets by Schumann and Dvorak with the Coull Quartet in 2017 and 2018 and a performance on two pianos of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* with Eylam Keshet in 2016.

As a teacher, Hicks has taught piano performance to fellow graduate students at Yale University and currently lectures at Northwestern University while teaching a private studio in Evanston, USA.



Recorded at the Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall, University of Manchester: 4 and 5 January 2020

Recording and mastering: James Cardell-Oliver

Photography: James Cardell-Oliver

Cover and booklet design: Maria Kolpaktchi

Tangle-Beat Blues and *Nine Preludes* are published by Edition Peters, London.
Blue Sounds for Piano is published by Composers Edition.

This record was made possible with generous support from the RVW Trust and the Ida Carroll Trust.

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ADM Mastering: Adaq Khan

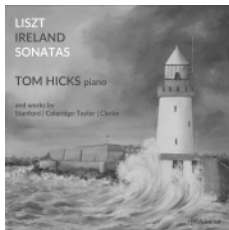
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1. **Tangle-Beat Blues (2013)** 12:45

2. **Blue Sounds for Piano (2019)** 11:09

Nine Preludes (2015-2016)

3. *Allegro molto – Poco meno mosso* 1:34

4. *Grave funebre – Poco meno mosso* 1:05

5. *Adagio molto rubato – Poco più mosso – Tempo 1 – Molto lento* 1:56

6. *Allegro scherzando – Poco meno mosso – Più andante* 2:35

7. *Andante con moto – Più adagio – Adagio molto* 1:52

8. *Prestissimo* 2:33

9. *Mesto* 1:09

10. *Allegro ritmico* 4:34

11. *Tempo di ciaccona – Meno mosso – Molto lento* 1:41

Total Time – 42:56



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