



**CLIFF EDGE**  
**DAVID WALLACE**

**Cliff Edge**  
**David Wallace** (b.1982)

- |    |                              |      |
|----|------------------------------|------|
| 1. | <b>L' Oiseau mis en cage</b> | 3:38 |
|    | Heather Roche, bass clarinet |      |
| 2. | <b>Cliff Edge</b>            | 6:22 |
|    | Chenyin Li, piano            |      |
| 3. | <b>Banshee</b>               | 8:41 |
|    | Jean Kelly, harp & voice     |      |

**H.B. J.W.**

James Widden, violin; Alison Holford, cello

- |     |   |      |
|-----|---|------|
| 4.  | I. Theme - Andante e sempre tranquillo      | 1:02 |
| 5.  | II. Variation 1 - Con moto                  | 0:45 |
| 6.  | III. Variation 2 - Valse                    | 0:34 |
| 7.  | IV. Variation 3 - Lento quasi una preghiera | 0:46 |
| 8.  | V. Variation 4 - Presto                     | 0:44 |
| 9.  | VI. Variation 5 - Andante a piacere         | 1:24 |
| 10. | VII. Coda - Allegro con brio                | 0:58 |

**Five Vignettes from the River Avon**

Jonathan Parkin, clarinet; Thomas Lessels, basset horn

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|-----|--------------------------|------|
| 11. | I. Visiting Swans        | 3:42 |
| 12. | II. Fading Light         | 2:36 |
| 13. | III. The Weir            | 3:30 |
| 14. | IV. Constant Flow        | 4:16 |
| 15. | V. Walk to the Crown Inn | 3:41 |

**Canticles**

Lise Vandersmissen, harp; Elizabeth Marr, flute; Jonathan Parkin, clarinet; James Widden & John Haworth, violins; Rebecca Breen, viola; Alison Holford, cello

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|-----|------------------------------|------|
| 16. | I. Lauds (Morning Prayer)    | 5:44 |
| 17. | II. Vespers (Evening Prayer) | 4:09 |
| 18. | III. Compline (Night Prayer) | 4:23 |

Total Playing Time 57:19

The pieces on Cliff Edge were written between 2006 and 2025 for different performers and circumstances, yet they share a common thread: each begins with a material that behaves in a particular way. I'm drawn to musical material that reveals itself slowly — through pressure, resistance, and the quiet negotiation between gesture and structure.

These works are not narratives but environments. They grow from the grain of an instrument, the weight of a harmony, the friction between two lines, or the memory of a place. Some are intimate gifts; others are studies in instability or quiet acts of devotion.

What unites them is a belief that music has its own agency - that if you listen closely, the material will show you how it wants to unfold. This album is a record of those unfoldings.

## **L'Oiseau mis en cage(2006)**

(bass clarinet)

Written for solo bass clarinet, L'Oiseau mis en cage is a study in fragility, pressure, and the quiet drama of constraint. The instrument's natural resistance — its soft-grain attacks, its unstable upper register, its breath-shaped phrasing — becomes the generative engine of the piece. Lines hover, strain, and fold back on themselves, as though testing the limits of an invisible enclosure.

The music unfolds like a small ecosystem under observation. Delicate inflections flicker at the edges of audibility, and trills accumulate tension without ever breaking into release. The form emerges from behaviour rather than development: compression, breakout, collapse. In its restraint, L'Oiseau mis en cage becomes one of the most intimate and revealing works on the album.

## **Cliff Edge(2025)**

(solo piano)

The title work is a portrait of instability. Angular, unbalanced gestures grind against a slow-moving harmonic undercurrent, creating a sense of tectonic friction. Rather than developing its ideas traditionally, Cliff Edge allows them to tilt, shear, and fracture, as though testing the limits of their own equilibrium.

A central collapse exposes the material's inner skeleton before the music rebuilds itself into a poised, precarious stillness. It is one of Wallace's most distilled statements of material agency and structural clarity — a piece that reveals its emotional weight through pressure, not rhetoric.

## **Banshee(2018)**

(harp and voice)

Banshee draws its power from the meeting point of breath and string. The voice and harp intertwine in a ritualised, keening dialogue where timbre becomes the primary expressive force. Whispered consonants, overtone-rich chords, and pressure-inflected vocalisations create a sound world that feels ancient, intimate, and dangerous. The most overtly Irish work on the album, the harpist mutters fractured refrains of the words "She is coming."

The piece never lapses into theatrics; instead, it channels a raw, elemental energy, as though summoning something just beyond the edge of speech. Banshee stands as one of Wallace's most striking explorations of the voice as a physical, textural instrument.

## **H.B. J.W. (2023)**

(violin and cello - theme, five variations and coda, written for a 50th birthday)

Composed as a 50th-birthday gift for violinist James Widden, H.B.J.W. is a miniature shaped with clarity, affection, and a quiet sense of occasion. Its theme is modest and finely drawn - an idea that feels offered rather than proclaimed — and it anchors five variations that explore its inner life with curiosity.

The violin and cello share a close harmonic and timbral space, giving the music the feeling of a private exchange. Each variation reveals a different facet of the theme: a brightening here, a shadowed turn there, a moment of playful counterpoint, a deepening of harmony. As a birthday gift, the piece becomes a portrait in miniature — a set of reflections shaped with warmth, virtuosity, and craftsmanship.

## **Five Vignettes from the River Avon(2025)**

(clarinet and basset horn — Visiting Swans; Fading Light; The Weir; Constant Flow; Walk to the Crown Inn)

These five miniatures form a quietly personal portrait of the River Avon, each one capturing a distinct moment or behaviour of the landscape. Scored for clarinet and basset horn, the set draws on the close familial timbre of the two instruments — their shared warmth, their soft grain, and their ability to blend into a single, breathing line.

Visiting Swans opens with gentle curiosity, tracing the slow, deliberate movements of the birds. Fading Light turns inward as dusk settles over the water. The Weir introduces turbulence through rhythmic pressure and registral contrast. Constant Flow restores equilibrium with steady, unbroken motion. Walk to the Crown Inn offers a grounded, human perspective — the memory of a familiar path at day's end.

## Canticles(2024)

(Lauds; Vespers; Compline - for harp, flute, clarinet, and string quartet)

Canticles is the most contemplative work on the album — a triptych shaped by breath, resonance, and quiet devotion. Scored for flute, clarinet, harp, and string quartet, the ensemble functions like a small, blended choir: the flute as a cantor, the clarinet as an inner voice, the harp as a resonance chamber, and the strings as a soft, breathing foundation.

Lauds opens with luminous restraint. Vespers deepens the colour palette into dusk-lit warmth. Compline moves into nocturnal richness, where mood becomes structural and the music seems to listen to itself.

The triptych closes the album with luminous austerity — a final, resonant breath after the turbulence and transformation of the preceding works.

Taken together, the works on Cliff Edge form a portrait of a composer committed to the inner life of musical material. Whether fragile or forceful, each piece reveals a world where sound behaves, transforms, and finds its own path. This album invites the listener not just to hear these processes, but to inhabit them.



**David Wallace** is a composer whose work explores the quiet pressures and transformative behaviour of musical material. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama with Richard Baker and in Ireland with Rhona Clarke, and his music has received international recognition including awards from Boston Metro Opera and the Tracey Chadwell Memorial Prize. Residencies at the Guildhall School, the Cork School of Music, and Clapham Chamber Concerts have shaped his distinctive voice, and his works are performed widely in the UK and abroad. He is Head of Junior Music Courses at the Guildhall School, represented by the Contemporary Music Centre Ireland, and published by Universal Edition. When not composing, he can usually be found enjoying coffee and exploring South London with his husband Omar and their Boston terrier, Eric.

Referred to as “The Queen of Extended Techniques” on Radio 3, clarinettist and new music specialist **Heather Roche** appears regularly on concert stages around the world as a soloist and chamber musician. Chamber music and close collaboration with composers are her jam. She is in the House Band for Sheffield’s Another Timbre label and is the clarinet tutor for the Darmstadt Summer Course. She lives in Woolwich with her partner and their cat, Vera.

Educated in Beijing, Auckland, and at London’s Guildhall School of Music & Drama, pianist **Chenyin Li** has performed with major orchestras and in venues such as Wigmore Hall and the Royal Festival Hall. She has appeared at festivals including Leeds International, Auckland International, Presteigne, and Xiamen. A prolific recording artist, she has been resident pianist for Pianist magazine since 2011, with more than ninety CDs to her name.

**Jean Kelly**, hailed for her “nuanced and stylish playing”, moves effortlessly between Early, Contemporary and Folk traditions. A graduate of the Royal College of Music, she records widely and appears with major orchestras as soloist and guest principal. Her harp playing features on numerous film and TV soundtracks and high-profile albums. She also performs and improvises on historical harps with The Telling and The Society of Strange and Ancient Instruments.

**James Widden** is a freelance violinist and violist. He has been the leader of St Paul’s Sinfonia since its inception in 2004 and has also played with the Philharmonia, BBC Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta and Endymion. He has been a soloist on Radio 3’s Hear and Now and is the dedicatee of the forthcoming Violin Concerto by Andrew Toovey.

Birmingham-born cellist **Alison Holford** studied at Huddersfield University and Trinity College of Music, where she served as principal cello in major ensembles. She now works extensively across London and the south-east, performing with St Paul's Sinfonia, Splinter Cell, Bridgetower Music, and Opéra de Baugé. Her opera work includes featured cello roles with OperaUpClose and the King's Head Opera. She has also appeared with Manchester Camerata and the Lancashire Sinfonietta and has performed concertos by Vivaldi, Brahms, Shostakovich, and Barber.

**Jonathan Parkin** leads a busy and exciting schedule as a leading orchestral clarinetist - he was appointed to the position of sub-principal clarinet with the BBC Symphony orchestra in spring 2023 and works regularly as guest principal clarinet with orchestras such as the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, City of London Sinfonia, RPO and BBC Concert Orchestra. A keen chamber musician he is an artistic director of South London based concert series Clapham Chamber Concerts where he regularly gives recitals.

**Thomas Lessels** is a British clarinet and bass clarinet player from Aberdeen. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music and is Principal Bass Clarinet of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Sub-Principal Clarinet with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. He is a founder member of the Ossian Ensemble and performs widely with groups including the European Chamber Players and Ensemble Amorpha.

Belgian harpist **Lise Vandersmissen** performs internationally on both modern pedal harp and Italian triple harp. A former Young Artist with Klara Radio, she won the Supernova chamber-music competition with the Aglica Trio and has released two solo albums on Etcetera Records, her third solo album is coming out in Summer 2026. Prizes include major awards in Slovenia, Hungary, and London, and she trained at LUCA School of Arts and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, later completing a two-year Guildhall Fellowship. She lives on a blue houseboat on the London canals.

**Elizabeth Marr** is a Scottish flute/piccolo player based in London having completed her bachelors at Trinity Laban and Masters at The Royal Conservatoire of The Hague. Alongside being a dedicated teacher of flute and piano she performs regularly with St Paul's Sinfonia, including as a soloist; the Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra, several of London's choral society's and her flute and harp duo Celtique. Opera is her passion; she has performed with Opera de Baugé since 2017, at The London Coliseum, and future projects include Opera Prelude at Opera Holland Park in Summer 2026.

**John Haworth** studied the violin with Steven Wilkie at the Royal Northern College of Music, playing in masterclasses with Benedict Holland and Levon Chilingirian and attending summer courses with Yossi Zivoni in Bruges and Oviedo. He completed a Master's degree at Trinity Laban, where he was taught by Diana Cummings. In 2008 and 2009 he studied with Evgeny Grach at the AIMS Academy at Solsona, Catalunya. John is a freelance performer and teacher in London

Irish violist, **Rebecca Breen**, is a master's graduate of the Royal College of Music, London where she was selected as a RCM Rising Star. Rebecca is now a busy freelance musician, working regularly with many UK orchestras and opera houses. An avid chamber musician, Rebecca has performed throughout Europe and has enjoyed residencies at Buxton International Festival and Britten Pears Young Artist programme in recent years. Rebecca is passionate about music education and teaches for the Junior department of Guildhall School of Music and Drama.



**David Wallace**



## Cliff Edge

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I am eternally grateful to the friends and family who gave their skills to this album – without you there would be no music.

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