

# MORE LIGHT

**Ian Pace** plays the piano music of  
**Christopher Fox**



**Christopher Fox** is a composer, based in the north of England, where he was born in 1955. He studied composition with Hugh Wood, Jonathan Harvey and Richard Orton at Liverpool, Southampton and York Universities and was awarded the degree of DPhil in composition from York University in 1984. In 1981 he won the composition prize of the Performing Right Society of Great Britain; since then he has established a reputation as one of the most individual composers of his generation. His work has been performed and broadcast world-wide and has featured in many of the leading new music festivals, from Montreal to St Petersburg and London to Sidney. Between 1984 and 1994 he was a member of the composition staff of the Darmstadt New Music Summer School and returned there in 1996 as a featured composer. During 1987 he lived in West Berlin as a guest of the DAAD Berlin Artists Programme. His work was featured in the BBC Promenade Concerts for the first time in 1997.

His writings on music have been published widely, in the journals *Contrechamps*, *Tempo*, *Contact* (of which he was an editor) and *Contemporary Music Review*, and deal principally with new music, in particular experimental, minimalist and complex tendencies in American and European music. More recently he was co-editor of *Von Kranichstein zur Gegenwart* (1995, Daco Verlag, Stuttgart), a history of 50 years of the Darmstadt Ferienkurse, and of *Uncommon Ground*, a book on the music of Michael Finnissy for Ashgate Press (1998, London).

As a composer Christopher Fox has worked with many of the leading new music ensembles and soloists, including the Arditti Quartet, Arraymusic (Toronto), Anthony de Mare, Roger Heaton, Rolf Hind, Ensemble Köln, Ensemble Bash, Philip Mead and the late Yvar Mikhashoff. Most recently he has established close relationships with the new generation of performers. In the Netherlands he has worked regularly with the brilliant young musicians of the Ives Ensemble who have featured his work in each of their last six concert seasons and for whom he wrote the ensemble cycle, *Themes and Variations*; they gave its UK premiere in the 1996 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.

Fox's work regularly extends beyond the conventional boundaries of the concert hall and includes the radio piece *Three Constructions after Kurt Schwitters*, commissioned by the BBC in 1993 and nominated for the Prix Italia, gallery installations in collaboration with video artists and printmakers and a 'musical box' made with the poet Ian Duhig. In 1996 the BBC commissioned a second radio work, *Alarmed and Dangerous*, which draws together brass instruments, security alarms and millenialist warnings and received its first broadcast on Radio 3 in November 1996.

Ian Pace has written that: 'Christopher is one of the few British composers to have absorbed the various questions and problems posed by modernism into their musical thinking and yet managed to move beyond them. Whenever I perform his music, it

produces fiercely opposed reactions: people may love it or hate it but they rarely forget it. That's the way it should be, I think.'

Fox himself says of his piano music: 'Between 1978 and 1987 I wrote no solo piano music: the musical ideas I was interested in exploring just didn't seem to be piano ideas. Then I wrote *More light* and since then I have written three other long works for solo piano - the two recorded here and *IlIiK.relliK* (1991-3) - as well as many more short pieces, represented here by *Paired off* and *Complementary Forms*.

'Why this change in attitude to the piano? I think the breakthrough came when I realised that it wasn't necessary to invent an entirely new way of playing the piano, that indeed it would be just as exciting to find new ways of using conventional figuration. Since then I have also had the stimulus of having a handful of wonderful pianists interested in what I might write for them: Philip Mead, John Snijders, Anthony de Mare, the late Yvar Mikhashoff and now Ian Pace, each with his own repertoire and his own art of touching the keyboard.'

In the notes that follow, Fox's original programme note for each work (where one exists) is printed first, followed first by his own remarks which mix hindsight and history and then by Ian Pace's performer's eye view of the music.

### **More light (1987-8)**

The musical ideas of *More light* are in a continual state of evolution, although the nature and pace of that evolution changes from section to section, and periodically an evolutionary process transforms an idea so radically that it metamorphoses into something new. In a sense the work does not have 'material': instead it consists of particular piano sonorities that the processes of the music call into being.

*More light* was written in 1987 and 1988 for Philip Mead, who commissioned it with funds from Northern Arts and premiered it on July 28 1988 in Newcastle Playhouse.

'The version of *More light* which Philip Mead played in Newcastle differed from the version recorded here in two respects. In a number of the long pauses the resonance caught by the pedal was reinforced electronically with sustained pitches played through small speakers placed directly under the piano - this proved to be aurally redundant and was immediately dropped. In the second main section of the piece there was some equally redundant over-writing which had to be removed rather more painstakingly. I had conceived this section in a number of contrapuntal layers and had simply written them all into the score without thinking through the muscular trauma I was creating for the pianist's hands, wrists and arms - where the pianist is now asked to play two notes on each demi-semiquaver I originally asked Philip to play three! Being the sort of musician he is he found a way of playing what I had written, but after the premiere he showed me a way of

revising the passage which would achieve a much greater fluidity of sound production while retaining the impression of contrapuntal density. It was one of the best composition lessons I have ever had.

'I composed *More light* in the belief that they were (in French) the dying words of Monet. The German composer Robert H P Platz later told me that (in German) they were the dying words of Goethe. In preparing these notes I've (re)discovered the most likely source of the title, an essay by Morton Feldman in which he writes of Cage's music that it 'as in Monet's later paintings, has us look into the sun, so to speak'. The essay is entitled 'More light' and is collected in Walter Zimmermann's edition of Feldman's writings and lectures, a volume which I had just reviewed for the journal *Contact* as I was beginning work on *More light*. Feldman died, tragically early, shortly afterwards and the slow music in *More light* became my memorial to him.' - C Fox

'When Wim Wenders was making his film *Kings of the Road*, he started not with a script but with an itinerary of locations which were to be visited. Yet the two main characters never stop anywhere for long; Wenders is more concerned with capturing a state of motion, the transience of everyday existence. The gaze at phenomena in transit, apprehension at their imminent passing serving to heighten one's appreciation, is for me the essence of *More light*. Sometimes it is as if the musical 'camera' is still, filming a moving object; at others, the object is still and the camera moves. But the piece is also preoccupied by death, by things dying away, the dying of Morton Feldman's 'light'. *More light* is one of the saddest and most beautiful pieces I've ever played; in it, sound is presented ('in it's own right', as the New York School composers would say), portrayed, surveyed, but never exploited.' - I Pace

### **Paired off (1995)**

*Paired off* was written in early 1995 at the invitation of the Evenings of New Music, Bratislava's new music festival. English pronunciation being the curious business that it is, the word 'pair' (meaning two things together) has exactly the same sound as the word 'pear' (what the French call 'poire'). In writing this piece I chose a number of my favourite melodies from Erik Satie's *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* and then used a technique which distorts one melody by wrapping it around the contours of another - in other words, they are "paired off". Satie's name (E = E, R = re = D, i, k, S = Es = E flat, A = A, t, i, E = E) gave me a five note chord to use throughout the piece, except in nine places where other chords are used to spell out the nine letters of his name (E is the 5th letter in the alphabet so the 5th chord is different, R is the 18th letter so the 44th (44 = 26 + 18) chord is different, and so on...)

'Satie was the theme for the 1995 Evenings of New Music and their director, Daniel

Matej, invited 25 composers from Europe and North America (others included James Tenney, Christian Wolff and Walter Zimmermann) to contribute reflections on the *Trois morceaux* to his "Satie City". The resulting pieces, including *Paired off*, were premiered by John Tilbury on 11 June 1995 in the Moyzes Hall and subsequently published in a stylish limited edition volume.' - C Fox

'Satie is one of my favourite composers. *Paired off* shares a quality with much of Satie's music, an inherent momentum that withstands the composer's attempts to control it.' - I Pace

### **Prime Site (1996-7)**

Our ability to discern musical form is wholly dependent on memory. In most music we become aware of musical change through the accretion of short-term memory as, step by step, a work unfolds, and we become aware of large-scale forms through their use of more or less exact repetition.

*Prime Site* eschews repetition: it is in seven continuous sections, each distinct but each also variously related (by pitch, duration, figuration) to all the other sections. For me the subject of the music is both the sound of the piano and this set of relationships, backwards and forwards through time across the work, setting up an increasingly complex counterpoint between the present and the past.

In the midst of composing *Prime Site* I came across an image from a medieval stained glass window showing Christ receiving the seven virtues. The virtues define Christ-likeness, but they are not themselves Christ. It struck me that what I was trying to write was music which, section by section, progressively reveals more of a musical subject but which never wholly represents the subject itself. That wholeness exists only in the listener's mind.

*Prime Site* was written between June 1996 and February 1997 for Ian Pace, who commissioned it with funds from the Yorkshire and Humberside Arts Board and gave the premiere in King's Hall, Newcastle University on 13 March 1997.

The "prime" of *Prime Site* is also a reference to prime numbers, to whose musical potential I was alerted by my teacher Richard Orton in the late 1970s. Ian Pace is not only a pianist but a maths graduate too and one of my first ideas when he asked me to consider writing for him was to incorporate something "mathematical" in the music. In the end the only audible traces of this are a series of co-prime relationships in the tempi of the fourth section and in the counterpoint of the last section. (Just as I was about to start work on the piece I was invited to be part of a Channel 4 television programme on the connections between mathematics and the arts. One discussion with a researcher, however, revealed to her that while I might be interested in the arcana of number I knew next to nothing about

One of the most exciting aspects of Christopher's music is the way that every piece is different to the last. When I commissioned *Prime Site*, I had no idea what to expect, even though I already knew many of his earlier pieces. Christopher did not disappoint; he came up with a piece utterly different from any that I had heard previously (by any composer). He described the "counterpoint between the present and past" but this piece seems to me to stare far into the future; it might take a generation or so before the importance of this and other recent pieces (such as the remarkable *Themes and Variations*) are fully appreciated. The harmonic working within individual sections has an omni-directional feel, in which individual notes seem to lie at the intersection of many conflicting force-fields. The formal schemata, by which the lengths of sections are imposed, apparently quite arbitrarily, on different types of musical material creates a dialectical interplay, an energising tension within the work.' - I Pace

### **Complementary Forms (1996)**

'Michael Finnissy was 50 in 1996 and as part of the birthday celebrations Ian Pace gave a concert at the British Music Information Centre in London for which he invited new pieces from Michael's composer friends. *Complementary Forms* was my offering and, like the Satie piece *Paired Off*, it plays games with names. The name 'Michael Finnissy' yields six pitches - C, B natural (h = B natural in German), A, E, F and E flat (the German S) - which became the material for all the odd-numbered bars in the piece. The other six pitches on the keyboard (C sharp, D, F sharp, G, A flat and B flat) then became the even-numbered 'complementary' bars and the whole piece is book-ended by five chords, two at the beginning in the rhythm 'Michael' and three at the end, 'Finnissy'.' - C Fox

'This was the very first tribute I played in the birthday concert. Whatever the systematic processes involved in its composition, the music still recalls passages in *More light* and *More things* - it's nonsense to say that systems are antithetical to individuality (as John Cage always said, it's all a matter of asking the right questions).' - I Pace

### **More things in the air than are visible (1992-4)**

In 1987 I wrote the piano piece for Philip Mead called *More light*. Philip and I had originally intended that the piece would have a tape part, but as I worked on the music the need for the tape part evaporated; *More light* turned into music for solo piano. So in 1992, when Philip asked whether I would like to write him a new piece, there was unfinished business to resolve.

*More things in the air than are visible* is in three movements (roughly five, four and fourteen minutes long respectively) of which the outer two involve tape, although in very different ways. In the first movement, a synthetic version of the piano defines a rhythmic

space while the live piano part gradually accumulates material. In the second movement there is a gradual shift in registers which takes the pianist's hands outwards and between the second and third movement this outward movement undergoes a metaphorical translation. In the third movement it's as if the piano itself has been taken out of the concert hall; once again the space which the piano occupies is defined by the tape part, but in this movement the space is an unedited recording of an aural landscape, somewhere in the vicinity of the concert hall.

'On a Monday morning some time in 1992 or 1993 I was listening to 'Start the Week' on BBC Radio 4 and heard the writer Ben Okri say that there were 'more things in the air than are visible'. I wrote the phrase down as soon as I could (I was driving at the time), in a sketchbook which I later lost; consequently, although I suspect the title came after the first music sketches (in a different sketchbook and dated 21/11/92 - a Saturday), I have no means of checking.

'Philip and I were never terribly strict about the instruction in the score that the tape for the third movement should be recorded "within a ten kilometre radius of the concert hall". For the first performance I recorded in some wet-lands at least ten miles away from York University and Philip used that tape in subsequent performances, until 26 May 1995 when, on my wife Amanda's birthday, I found a wonderful, hidden location beside one of the canals which pass through the centre of Birmingham (Philip was playing the piece in Birmingham Repertory Theatre as part of the BBC's 'Music Live 95' festival). The reappearance of those sounds on this recording is a memento of many other happy birthdays!' - C Fox

'Picture a common situation at a concert: an audience perched on uncomfortable seats, hardly daring to move in case they make a sound. Should anyone make some small spontaneous gesture induced by their feelings about the music, someone else will cast a disapproving glance in their direction. The icy silence is not about hearing the music better, it's a form of dutiful behaviour. In *More things in the air than are visible* the piano is metaphorically removed from its rarefied surroundings and placed right in the centre of things. It becomes a 'piano-in-the-world'; the music happily co-exists with the real world, rather than acting as a refuge from it.' - I Pace

**Ian Pace** was born in Hartlepool and studied at Chetham's School of Music, Oxford University and the Juilliard School, New York, with the Hungarian pianist György Sándor, a pupil of Bartók. Based in London since 1993 he has pursued an active international pianistic career performing in ten countries and appearing at major festivals such as Bath, Aldeburgh, Norfolk and Norwich, Sonorities (Belfast), European Discoveries (London), Ars Musica (Brussels), Utopie Musik (Innsbruck), International Bartók Festival (Szombathéli), and Confrontaties (Rotterdam). He has established an enviable reputation for playing a very large and varied repertoire, from the 18th through 20th centuries, but with a particular emphasis on music of the present day, and has worked closely with many of the composers who have written especially for him. In the last three years alone, Ian Pace has given over 75 world-première performances of solo piano music by composers as diverse as Julian Anderson, Richard Barrett and Howard Skempton. Concerto appearances include Bristol (Tchaikovsky), Hull (Messiaen & Stravinsky), Huddersfield (Finnissy), Hartlepool (Rachmaninov) and London, where he gave the world première of Morgan Hayes' *Shellac* with the Athelas Sinfonietta in 1997.

In 1996 he gave a six concert series of the complete piano music of Michael Finnissy at Conway Hall, to celebrate the composer's 50th birthday, a series that was received with great critical acclaim and described as "one of the great piano marathons of our time" in *Classical Music*. During the same year he also gave performances of the complete piano works of Brian Ferneyhough (in Hungary) and Helmut Lachenmann (in Belfast). In 1997 he presented a series of the complete works of Howard Skempton and in 1998 a major recital series around the works of Christopher Fox.

Ian Pace has recorded to date five full length CDs for METIER, including the disc-long *Verdi Transcriptions* of Michael Finnissy, and for NMC a recital disc of works by Chris Dench, James Erber, Ferneyhough, Fox and Barrett. All these CDs will be released over the next two years.

Ian Pace has also written articles for numerous journals including, among others, *The Musical Times* and *Tempo*. In 1997, he was co-author and editor of a book on the music of Michael Finnissy, *Uncommon Ground* (published by Ashgate, 1997).



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# Christopher Fox

piano music

MSVCD92022

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## Ian Pace - piano

1	More Light	22:39
2	Paired off	3:23
	Prime Site	
3	section 1	4:13
4	section 2	2:31
5	section 3	3:28
6	section 4	2:07
7	section 5	3:06
8	section 6	4:14
9	section 7	3:13
10	Complementary Forms	2:34
	More things in the air than are visible	
11	section 1	4:59
12	section 2	3:59
13	section 3	14:39

This recording was made on 7 & 8 March 1998 at Christ's Hospital, Horsham in the presence of the composer

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