

York Late Music presents – ‘Piano Miniatures - 1916 to the present day’.

David Hammond Piano

Friday 4th October, Unitarian Church, St Saviourgate, York at 1pm.

Programme

William Baines	<i>Purple Heights</i> (1921)
Julius Harrison	<i>Far Forest</i> (1928)
Madeleine Dring	<i>Prelude</i> (1948)
John Longmire	<i>Regent Street</i> (1962)
Howard Skempton	<i>Quavers</i> (1972)
David Power	<i>Eight Miniatures</i> (1997 - 2001)
David Breslin	<i>Basse-Danse</i> (2022)
Ewan East	<i>Aquarius</i> (2024)
David Hammond	<i>Two pieces</i> (2013)
Howard Skempton	<i>The Durham Strike</i> (1985)
Richard Rodney Bennett	<i>Diversions</i> (1965)
Christopher Headington	<i>Italian Dance</i> (1959)
Billy Mayerl	<i>Song of the fir tree</i> (1938)
Constance Warren	<i>Idyll in Gb</i> (1930)
Leo Livens	<i>Moonbeams</i> (1915)

William Baines - *Purple Heights* (1921)

This composition is the last in the set *Coloured Leaves*, written in the year before Baines’ death at the age of 23 from tuberculosis. Since Baines (1899 – 1922) was a Yorkshireman, I like to think that strident piece is describing the heather moors of his home county. Less dissonant than some of his other works, the music has a modal feel reminiscent of folk music, while being firmly in the vein of composers such as Scriabin (whom Baines is often compared with).

David Hammond

Julius Harrison - *Far Forest* (1928)

Known primarily as an opera conductor, Julius Harrison (1885–1963) was also a prolific composer, whose most popular work, *Bredon Hill*, a rhapsody for violin and orchestra (1942) was inspired by the Worcestershire countryside. Concise and eloquent, *Far Forest* (1928) exploits contrasts in register and incorporates a mini-cadenza and a wistful coda. It is the last of three sketches Harrison wrote for piano, collectively entitled *Severn Country*.

Paul Conway

Madeleine Dring - *Prelude* (1948)

Dring (1923 – 1977) is perhaps better known for her output of vocal music; however she wrote a number of pieces for piano, including this moody prelude. She studied with Herbert Howells, and some influence can be seen in her use of harmony, though the resultant music is certainly in a

different vein. This piece with its underlying semiquaver movement is an exploration of the piano, with jazz harmonies emerging throughout.

David Hammond

John Longmire - *Regent Street* (1962)

When we were planning the Hundred Years CD, Duncan Honeybourne offered to meet me at the Steinway Centre in London so he could play through through possible repertoire. Duncan brought about four pieces from each decade of the hundred years and all the music on the final CD apart from the Fricker, Skempton, Reynolds and my own miniatures is from Duncan's collection. I vividly remember the moment he launched enthusiastically into *Regent Street* and I remember thinking: whatever else Duncan has brought from this decade, we have to include this piece. I was so pleased Duncan readily agreed. Paul Conway wrote the following about this piece for the CD sleeve notes:-

'Born in Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, John Longmire (1902–1986) studied with John Ireland at the Royal College of Music. He became a lifelong friend of Ireland and published a biography of him. Longmire's compositions were mainly for piano but he also wrote operettas, choral works, chamber music and some orchestral scores. *Regent Street* (1962) is a light piece in the same vein as Eric Coates's *Oxford Street* march. Marked 'with swing', the jazzy main idea is contrasted with a flowing, trio-like theme of understated nobility'.

David Power and Paul Conway.

Howard Skempton - *Quavers* (1972)

Howard Skempton is a member of the English experimental school and one of the things they try to do is to find new ways to write tonal music. In Skempton's case, he has written a large number of short, standalone piano pieces that – to a point – bring Erik Satie to mind. But there is a distinctive stillness in a lot of Skempton's music that really points up chord changes etc when they happen and brings some new sensibilities to the solo piano repertoire. *Quavers* is the first of six pieces with this title by Skempton, and Duncan Honeybourne included it on his *Hundred Years of British Piano Miniatures* CD.

David Power

David Power - *Eight Miniatures* (1997 – 2001).

In the late 1990s I lost my way as a composer and, to find my way back, I decided to write some piano miniatures that would never be performed. The idea was to see what really mattered to me as a composer when all external expectations had been removed. The simplicity and directness of the resulting music greatly surprised me but turned out to be me finally finding my true voice as a composer. Slightly ironically, given their start in life, they have become my best-known piece. They have had several performances, been broadcast on national radio networks in Austria and the Republic of Ireland and recorded on Duncan Honeybourne's 'A Hundred Years of British Piano

Miniatures' CD. Two of the miniatures Nos 2 and 4 have gone viral securing nearly two million and over half a million streams respectively on Spotify.

David Power

David Breslin - *Basse-Danse* (2022)

During the Renaissance, “basse-danse” was a general term for any slow, stately dance where the feet are kept close to the ground. Such dances are often rhythmically complex despite their sober mood. I wrote this piece during February Album Writing Month 2022, along with four other pieces inspired by Renaissance and Baroque dance. My obsession with scales and modes surfaced in this one – it starts in a harmonically ambiguous Phrygian mode, and briefly passes through Flat-Sixth Mixolydian and the Double Harmonic scale.

David Breslin

Ewan East – *Aquarius* (2024 - first performance)

Continuing Ewan's PhD research into individual interpretation in classical contemporary music through the creation of non-sequential compositions, there became a desire to produce a body of works that would provide a musical representation of a person, individualised to them. Inspired by his wife, Niamh East, and her interest in zodiac signs, Ewan realised that this could be the perfect concept to capture individual musical representation, as every person on the planet has zodiac signs associated with them. The composition performed today is one movement from thirty-six trio compositions. With each zodiac sign represented, David had the chance to choose his own zodiac representation or one of the remaining eleven movements for piano. When listening, it is Ewan's intention that you hear a musical representation of someone with this zodiac sign, whether this is David performing or someone you know. Although it could be considered impossible to create truly unique compositions for every individual, it is his hope that *Interpretations of the Zodiac Signs* is as close as one can get.

Ewan East

David Hammond - *Two pieces* (2013)

These pieces are part of a set of five, which were written over a period of about 10 years – well rather, started and then re-found years later. They are formed from chords or patterns that I put together while improvising to myself, then gradually worked into pieces having notated these patterns. The ostinato and later melody in the first piece re-emerge in the second, in a decidedly different mood.

David Hammond

Howard Skempton - *The Durham Strike* (1985)

I am indebted to David Power, both for curating this concert, and for introducing me to Skempton's music. With hints of Satie in many of the pieces, there are also pieces like this set of variations that bring together other influences to create something unique. The piece was written

in response to the coal miners' strike in the UK and is a set of variations on a haunting slowed down jig melody.

David Hammond

Richard Rodney Bennett - *Diversions* (1965)

This set of seven short pieces were composed as studies for piano students – like many studies they have a certain charm and certainly transfer to a concert setting. As with Madeleine Dring there is a clear jazz influence in Bennett's music, within decidedly non-jazz forms. Some of these are the most miniature miniatures in this concert!

David Hammond

Christopher Headington - *Italian Dance* (1959)

Composer and writer Christopher Headington (1930–1996) also had a successful career as a pianist which took in recitals, broadcasts, films and recordings. His repertoire was extensive and embraced neglected compositions. As a creative artist he often wrote for his own instrument and his output includes a piano concerto, a piano quartet and several keyboard works. *Italian Dance* (1959) is a spirited vignette, driven by an insistent, tarantella-like rhythm in compound time. The insouciant closing gesture sets the seal on the score's epigrammatic drollery.

Paul Conway

Billy Mayerl - *Song of the Fir Tree* (1938)

Billy Mayerl (1902 – 1959) made a career in the music halls and theatres of London, and became a "master of light music" - despite nearly being expelled from Trinity College of Music for composing in a jazz style! This piece is typical of his style – sentimental perhaps, but full of rich harmonies and virtuosic flourishes that ensured his music enjoyed great success.

David Hammond

Constance Warren – *Idyll in Gb Major* (1930)

Constance Warren (1905 – 1984) was an English composer and piano teacher – Brian Ferneyhough was one of her pupils! All her own compositions date from her student days at the Royal Academy which she left in 1932 and most of them are miniatures. It is not known why she stopped composing but if this piece is anything to go by, it is certainly to be regretted. Duncan Honeybourne included the piece on his *A Hundred Years of British Piano Miniatures* CD in what is, as far as we have been able to establish, the only commercial recording so far of any of her music.

David Power

Leo Livens – *Moonbeams* (1915)

Leo Livens (1896 – 1990) – and his sister Evangeline – both became composers but both were beset by serious mental health issues that saw them hospitalized for much of their adult lives. Nevertheless both wrote music that is increasing finding its audience.

Moonbeams shows the influence of the impressionistic piano writing of Debussy and Ravel but Livens is nevertheless very much his own man as can be heard in this attractive little piece. It was recorded by Duncan Honeybourne for his *One Hundred Years of British Piano Miniatures* CD which came out on the Naxos Grand Piano label in 2018. It is – as far as we could establish – the first time any of Livens' music has been recorded but, if the quality of *Moonbeams* is anything to go by, it certainly won't be the last.

David Power

Biography – David Hammond:

David Hammond grew up in Oxfordshire, where he studied piano with Judy Thompson. He continued his education in York, completing a degree in music at the University of York, and an ATCL diploma under the tuition of Liz Haddon.

Since then he has developed a career as a pianist, specialising in accompaniment. He has worked with many soloists, from beginners to professionals, and with choirs, opera groups and in musical theatre.

He has performed in concert series throughout the country, including Manchester, Carlisle, Lincoln and Wakefield Cathedrals. He has recently performed the piano part in Schubert's Eb piano trio, with the Clementhorpe Trio in the Clothworkers Hall in Leeds. David is a regular musician for services at St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, and runs their lunchtime concert series.

He has always had a varied taste in music, which has helped to inform his playing, and contribute to his versatility as a performer. While at university he became involved in Javanese gamelan music which has led to running workshops, composing for the gamelan and leading a community gamelan group in York. Alongside this he has been involved in folk music, playing keyboards in Fiddlers Wreck and Rastrum, active and established ceilidh bands in the York area.

As well as performing, David has a keen interest in composition, studying with Bill Brooks and Roger Marsh at the university. His style reflects his eclectic performing career – expect folk melodies, jazz harmonies and rhythms from popular styles of music.

Alongside music, David works for St Nicks, a local environmental charity which runs projects in all aspects of sustainability, helping to operate their award-winning pedal and electric powered recycling scheme.