

Meridian



MUSIC FOR STRINGS - ISIS ENSEMBLE - JACQUES COHEN

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World Premiere Recordings

[1]	Bee Sting Dance in Rohan's Kitchen Rohan Kriwaczek	5:32
[2]	Yigdal Fantasia on a Traditional Jewish Theme for Strings Jacques Cohen	16:43
	Suite for Strings Salomón Cuéllar	
[3]	Allegro	3:57
[4]	Cantabile	3:03
[5]	Allegro	4:07
[6]	The Old Castle from Pictures at an Exhibition Modest Mussorgsky arr. Jacques Cohen	4:26
	Variations on a Ukrainian Folksong Malcolm Arnold arr. Roger Steptoe	
[7]	Theme	1:16
[9]	Variation II	1:00
[11]	Variation IV	1:54
[13]	Variation VI	0:54
[15]	Variation VIII	1:40
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[14]	Variation VII	0:52
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[18]	Modlitwa ('Prayer') Andrzej and Roxanna Panufnik	5:55

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Bee Sting Dance in Rohan's Kitchen

Rohan Kriwaczek (b. 1968)

One of the most prolific and versatile artists working today, Rohan Kriwaczek is currently best known for his book, *An Incomplete History of the Art of Funerary Violin*. He has written orchestral, vocal, chamber and electro-acoustic music, as well as music for radio and television, and has performed as a folk fiddler, cabaret singer-pianist and bagpiper throughout the world.

This piece is a medley of two originally separate pieces, *Rohan's Kitchen* for fiddle and guitar, and *Bee Sting Dance* for fiddle and piano. At Jacques's suggestion, Rohan sandwiched the second piece within the first and arranged them both for strings. A quartet version was first performed at Jacques's wedding in February 2007 and the string orchestra version played on this CD was premiered by the Isis Ensemble the following June, to a rapturous response. The manic energy of its rhythms and the quirky twists of the melody make it utterly irresistible!

Yigdal

Fantasia on a Traditional Jewish Theme for Strings

Jacques Cohen (b.1969)

Yigdal is scored for a string orchestra that divides into a maximum of thirteen parts. It was premiered to great critical acclaim by the Isis Ensemble in 2006 and has been performed many times by the Yehudi Menuhin School Orchestra under the direction of Malcolm Singer.

The composition is in part a personal contemplation of Judaism and Jewish history. The title - a Hebrew word meaning "Magnified" - refers to the first word of a hymn which forms a fundamental part of the Jewish liturgy. There are several tunes for this hymn; the one

employed here being generally reserved for use on high holy days. No-one is certain of the exact origin of this haunting melody although its mode - making use of augmented second intervals which sound particularly potent to Western ears - indicates that it is probably from Eastern Europe.

Yigdal begins with a drone coloured by mysterious harmonies before the melody is tentatively introduced by the violins. This is then combined with a second theme. As the intensity grows, the tonality becomes more uncertain and the harmony more dissonant. After the main climax, the atmosphere becomes calmer and the theme reappears in its simplest form just before the end, a single violin playing against a shimmering accompaniment. In spite of the earlier moods of tragedy and turmoil, the piece closes on a note of quiet resolution.

Suite for Strings

Salomón Cuéllar (b.1990)

Allegro - Cantabile - Allegro

Salomón Cuéllar was born in Zürich and is now studying at Dulwich College in South London. After starting the piano at the age of 4 and briefly studying violin and cello, he gave up taking conventional lessons and instead turned his attention to improvisation. It was out of these improvisations at the piano that this, his first major work, eventually grew, and the first performance was given in 2006 by Arco Strings conducted by Jacques Cohen.

The boldness of Salomón's ideas and his innate sympathy with string instruments make this a very striking and effective work. Two outer movements with relentless energy, sudden changes of texture, and irregular, unpredictable phrase lengths frame a contrasting, calm, central movement.



The Old Castle from **Pictures at an Exhibition**

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)

Arranged for string orchestra by Jacques Cohen

The original piano suite from 1874 describes ten pictures by Mussorgsky's friend Victor Hartmann. This, the second picture, depicts a melancholy troubadour singing nostalgically by a medieval castle on a mysterious, warm summer evening.

This version was first performed by the Isis Ensemble in 2007 and Jacques plans to arrange the rest of the suite for strings when the opportunity arises!

Variations on a Ukrainian Folksong

Malcolm Arnold (1921-2006)

Arranged for string orchestra by Roger Steptoe (b. 1953)

Malcolm Arnold's vast output includes music for strings, piano, brass band and chamber groups. His orchestral music includes overtures, suites, 9 Symphonies and 80 film scores, among them ***Bridge on the River Kwai***. This 45-minute score took him a mere ten days to write and won him an Oscar in 1958.

Variations on a Ukrainian Folksong - originally for solo piano - was written in 1944 and dedicated to John Kuchmy, a Ukrainian violinist who was Arnold's friend and colleague in the London Philharmonic where, at the time, the composer was also establishing himself as one of the country's leading trumpet players.

The folksong in question was very popular in its American setting, ***Yes, my Darling Daughter***. As with most of Arnold's music, irreverent humour is evident throughout and the alternation of two contrasting ideas is a feature of nearly every variation.

Arnold authorised fellow composer Roger Steptoe to arrange the piece for string orchestra, and the first performance of this version was given by the Budapest Chamber Orchestra as part of the Norwich Festival in 1993.

The piece opens with the Theme (7) played by solo violin, the dissonant accompaniment perhaps anticipating the inebriated introduction to Arnold's overture ***Tam O'Shanter***. The East European flavour continues in Variation I (8), a recitative with sudden changes of mood and tempo. Variation II (9) is a scherzo, Variation III (10), a march interrupted by cheeky glissandos. Variation IV (11) consists of gentle arpeggios for solo players punctuated by a three-note figure for the rest of the ensemble. In Variation V (12), entitled "Interlude", the theme is played in canon by high violins and low cellos and basses. Variation VI (13) is a short, lively variation with tremolos and arpeggios but also with moments of reflection, Variation VII (14), a pizzicato rumba interrupted by mischievous arpeggios from 1st violins. The last three variations are somewhat more substantial: Variation VIII (15) entitled "Presto", and then Variation IX (16) marked "Andante Cantabile", evoking Chopin. The final variation, Variation X (17) is entitled "Fantasia", the theme played backwards interpolated with dramatic passages in fast repeated notes and solo violin cadenzas. This is followed by the final return of the opening theme.



Modlitwa ('Prayer')

Andrzej Panufnik (1914 - 91)

Roxanna Panufnik (b. 1968)

One of the most important Polish composers of his generation alongside Lutoslawski, Andrzej Panufnik moved to England and became a British citizen in 1961. His output includes 9 symphonies, of which the best known is probably the 3rd, *Sinfonia Sacra*. He developed a highly personal style, unmistakably 20th Century, yet very direct and appealing.

His daughter Roxanna has written 2 operas, chamber music and choral music including the hugely successful *Westminster Mass*.

A year before his death, Andrzej was invited by his friend the Polish poet Jerzy Pietrkiewicz to set a *Modlitwa* (or "prayer") that he had written to the Virgin of Skempe. Since he was already ill, Andrzej only managed to complete the outer sections of the piece. Jerzy therefore invited Roxanna to complete the middle part. Andrzej had already arranged his earlier choral piece *Song to the Virgin Mary* for string sextet, and had often likened the sound of stringed instruments to the human voice, so it felt right for Roxanna to also complete an arrangement of *Modlitwa* for strings. A quartet version was played by the Chilingirian Quartet in 1999 and this string orchestra version, as Roxanna says, has been "especially made for Jacques Cohen and his Isis Ensemble" for this recording in 2007.

The piece is slow and, as before in Andrzej's music, poignancy is heightened by simultaneous use of major and minor chords. Roxanna seems to have adapted her style to make the points at which she takes over and leaves off completely seamless.

Sadly, Jerzy Pietrkiewicz died, aged 91, while this CD was in production. His own prose translation of the original poem is printed below:

From lake to lake,
from islet to islet a pagan Skempe.
But you baptised it with your smile,
Maiden, bent over sin.
In the image and likeness
of the waiting girl
a transient chisel brought you out to light,
so that even from this conception in wood,
shavings of miracle would fall into penance.

Oh, angel my guardian
whose face and name I do not know,
stand always by my side
at a precipitous distance of conscience.



Isis Ensemble

1st Violins:

Susanne Stanzeleit (leader), Ruth Ehrlich, Lucy Waterhouse,
Dominic Moore, Vladimir Naumov, David Beaman

2nd Violins:

Celia Waterhouse, Mark Butler, Steven Dinwoodie, Julian Saxl

Violas:

Judith Busbridge, Rose Redgrave, Oliver Wilson, Janina Kopinska

Cellos:

Andrew Fuller, Michael Atkinson, Hannah Stuart

Basses:

Kenneth Knussen, Catherine Ricketts

The Isis Ensemble was launched as a fully professional orchestra in 2005.

Based in London, its members are comprised of international soloists, high-profile chamber musicians, and experienced orchestral players with collective experience of virtually every major professional orchestra in the UK.

The Isis Ensemble performs a wide range of music from Bach through the classical and romantic repertoire to the present day. It is committed to promoting new music alongside works from the standard repertoire and is renowned for the energy and passion of its performances.

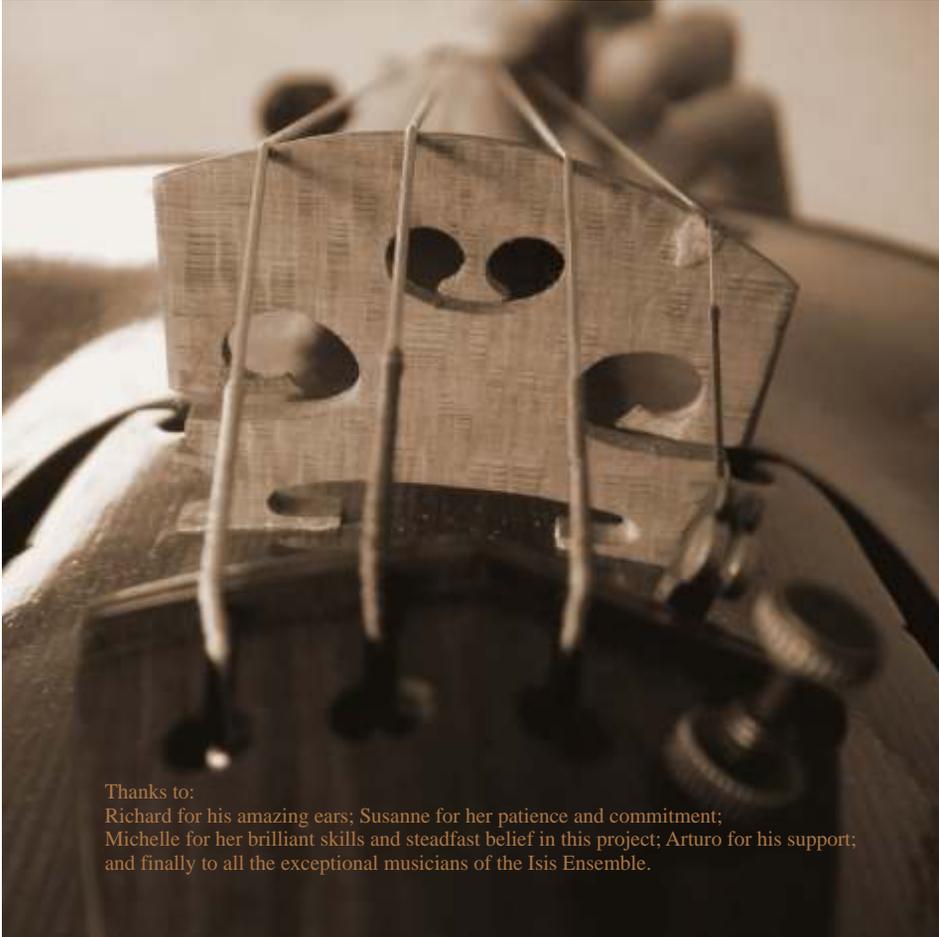
www.isisensemble.com

info@isisensemble.com

Susanne Stanzeleit has performed worldwide as a soloist and chamber musician. Her extensive repertoire has featured many commissions and UK premieres of works by composers such as Peter Maxwell Davies, John Adams, Lou Harrison, György Kurtág, John Woolrich, Philip Cashian, Rebecca Saunders and many more. Susanne has recorded over 30 CDs which have all attracted rave reviews worldwide. She was first violin of the Edinburgh String Quartet until 2002 and co-leader of Sinfonia 21, as well as guest-leading many of the foremost chamber orchestras and contemporary music groups in the UK.

Jacques Cohen studied at Oxford and at the Royal College of Music where he was awarded, among other prizes, the Tagore Gold Medal for the most outstanding student. In addition to the Isis Ensemble, he has worked with dozens of orchestras around the world including the London Symphony Orchestra, City of Oxford Orchestra, Bombay Chamber Orchestra and George Enescu Philharmonic in Bucharest. He is also Music Director of the International Seychelles Music Festival. Recent compositions include commissions for orchestra, choir, band and chamber groups. He is also widely admired as a communicator, explaining music in a uniquely entertaining and informative way. www.jacquescohen.co.uk





Thanks to:
Richard for his amazing ears; Susanne for her patience and commitment;
Michelle for her brilliant skills and steadfast belief in this project; Arturo for his support;
and finally to all the exceptional musicians of the Isis Ensemble.

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Recorded by Richard Hughes
Producer: Michelle Taylor-Cohen
Assistant engineer: Alex Gettinby
Editing by Susanne Hughes

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