

MARCUS BLUNT

ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Symphony No. 2
Piano Concerto
Concertino for Bassoon
Aspects of Saturn



Murray McLachlan piano
Lesley Wilson bassoon
Manchester Camerata
Stephen Threlfall conductor

intangible classics

MARCUS BLUNT (b.1947)

Piano Concerto *

1	I	Molto moderato	11:02	27:29
2	II	Largo	7:44	
3	III	Allegro	8:43	

4 **Aspects of Saturn**, for string orchestra **6:50**

Concertino for Bassoon and String Orchestra **

5	I	Prelude	2:11	11:47
6	II	Aria	2:53	
7	III	Scherzo	1:36	
8	IV	Elegy	2:54	
9	V	Finale	2:12	

Symphony No. 2

10	I	Allegretto	3:17	16:54
11	II	Andante	5:10	
12	III	Allegretto	5:09	
13	IV	Allegretto	3:18	

Total duration **63:21**

* MURRAY McLACHLAN piano | ** LESLEY WILSON bassoon

MANCHESTER CAMERATA

Conducted by **STEPHEN THRELFALL**

ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Piano Concerto

My *Piano Concerto* was written between 1992 and 1995. Although my own keyboard skills are somewhat limited, the piano has always held a central place in my musical life, so that it was perhaps natural for me to be drawn to the idea of writing a piano concerto (a first abortive attempt having been made when I was only 17, long before my mature idiom had developed).

However, following its completion I experienced great difficulty in finding a soloist willing to take it on – until several years later Murray McLachlan took an interest in my music; his article about my piano output appeared in the July/August 2005 issue of *Piano* magazine, under the title *Intervalllic Symbols*, and the following year he went on to record all my solo piano works for the Dunelm label; the CD was reissued in 2014 by Divine Art.

The first movement opens with an assertive, confident five-note motif on brass, which is answered by a gently descending arpeggio/scale-based response from piano and strings. As the piano goes on to explore this material, the instability of that fifth note becomes apparent: how should it resolve? A fifth different attempt brings us to a slightly faster tempo and a new, more lyrical, theme – although it is not completely new, as it does include elements of what has gone before. From here on, the process is one of continual development, until at last there is a powerful build-up towards what seems likely to be a triumphant conclusion. Instead comes catastrophe, out of which a long-held note on horns marks the start of the slow central movement.

At first the atmosphere is tense, mysterious, subdued, as muted strings gradually feel their way into a new strand of melody. In fact the whole movement is based on what happens in these first dozen or so bars, with a broad range of emotions explored along the way, before finally it all subsides into a mood of the most profound calm.

After the tensions of the slow movement, the *Allegro* finale almost bursts into life with a release of pent-up energy. The six-note opening theme bears a family resemblance to that of the first movement, and after about a minute a new motif displaces it, only to be as-it-were swallowed up by yet another. However, this turns out to be a greatly speeded-up version of a theme from the slow movement, now full of rhythmic drive and vitality. Eventually this relaxes into the return (on strings at first) of another melody from the slow movement, which goes on to form the basis of much of the piano's subsequent *Cadenza*. When the orchestra returns, it is with a return of the opening, after its prolonged absence. Other themes are also revisited as the music builds to its dramatic, decisive conclusion, in the form of a final appearance of that initial five-note motif.

Aspects of Saturn for string orchestra

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
Sat grey-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone.

Keats: *Hyperion*

*...redeunt Saturnia regna,
Iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.*
...the golden days of Saturn's reign return,
Now a new race descends from high heaven.

Virgil: *Eclogues*

Saturnus was the ancient Roman god of agriculture, reputedly the founder of civilization and social order, whilst in astrology Saturn represents self-discipline, self-consciousness, limitation – yet also perseverance, ambition and aspiration.

Something of this contradiction can be seen in the above quotations – and also perhaps felt in **Aspects of Saturn**, with its harmonies and themes so closely inter-related, growing from a quiet and somewhat dark opening to achieve controlledly ecstatic heights of expression, before eventually subsiding into an almost other-worldly calm at the close.

Concertino for bassoon & string orchestra

In 1989 I wrote *Lorenzo the Much-Travel'd Clown* – essentially a concise four-movement Sonata – for bassoon & piano. Early in 2016, knowing that Lesley Wilson's enthusiasm for this piece (she premiered it in 2001) had led her to feature it prominently in a forthcoming CD – entitled *A Much-Travel'd Clown*, and subsequently released (January 2017) on Aberdeen University's Vox Regis label – I decided to adapt the piano part for string orchestra, in the hope that this might give the music wider currency. Not only that, but I also inserted an extra movement, by adding an accompaniment to my solo-bassoon *Scotch Song* of 1984.

The five short movements begin with a vigorous *Prelude*, and this is followed by the *Scotch Song* arrangement (*Aria*), in which the strings are muted. Both themes in the central *Scherzo* feature smoothly flowing semiquavers – and the first of them is subsequently much slowed down and extended to form the basis of the elegiac fourth movement; here the strings are again muted, and towards the close there is a *cadenza* for the solo bassoon.

A disarmingly perky little tune opens the *Finale*. The contrasting second melody is actually a variant of the *Prelude's* first theme, now almost unrecognizably serene and smooth in outline. This *Finale*, as with similar movements in my music, revisits earlier themes, exploring further possibilities that they offer, before a last appearance of that cheeky opening tune concludes the work.

In this *Concertino*, I hope I have demonstrated convincingly that there is far more emotional and expressive depth to the bassoon than its unfairly dismissive “clown of the orchestra” nickname implies!

Symphony No. 2

In 1991 I was commissioned to write a substantial piece for the Wigton Festival in Cumbria, to be scored for the same combination of instruments as Schubert's Octet, and the resulting five-movement work (*The Throstle-Nest in Spring*) was successfully premiered there the following year. However, I subsequently came to feel that this music would be better suited to orchestral treatment, and in 2002 it metamorphosed into this four-movement *Symphony*, scored for a modest-sized orchestra (no trombones, tuba, or percussion other than timpani).

The opening movement is a bright and cheerful *Allegretto*, with two contrasting themes, the first somewhat angular, the second less so but equally restless and rhythmically energetic. The final appearance of the first is unexpectedly relaxed, however, leading to a calm conclusion.

The *Andante* second movement is also based on two themes – but to entirely different effect; muted strings create a nocturne-like atmosphere, with the first melody forming almost hesitantly above a long-held note on cellos, and the second following on seamlessly. Thereafter, the two themes undergo continual development, until at last some sense of repose and resolution is achieved.

The *Allegretto* third movement starts like a *Scherzo*, its angular first theme reminiscent perhaps of the beginning of this whole symphonic journey. A descending arpeggio-like figure becomes more and more prominent, until at length it assumes the role of “2nd subject”, and introduces a gradual broadening effect (although the pulse actually remains the same). Suddenly a third theme steals in – not, however, a new one, but rather an extended variant of the *Andante's* second melody. Eventually the music subsides into a mood of deepest tranquillity and resignation.

The final movement is again marked *Allegretto*, and again opens with the angularity which characterized the openings of its *Allegretto* predecessors. The second theme of this finale is yet another variant of that fertile melody from the *Andante* – and in fact the rest of the movement proceeds to demonstrate that all the Symphony's ideas are related, rooted as they are in the same very individual harmonic language. To underline this point, the work ends with a triumphant combination of two of them.



Recording the Symphony in the RNCM Concert Hall

THE COMPOSER

Marcus Blunt was born in Birmingham in 1947. Although around the age of 9 he had piano lessons from his father for a year or more, and made his first attempts at composition, his interest in music did not really take off until he was 14. He went on to study composition at University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, graduating in 1970. After a remarkably wide variety of abodes – in rural Warwickshire, Manchester, York, and London – and occupations – ranging from warehouse packer and photographic processor to department manager at a music publishers – he settled in Derby in 1976 as a teacher of woodwind instruments. In 1990 he and his wife Maureen decided to seek a more congenial environment for his composing work, and are now enjoying the gentler pace of life just North of the Border. In 1997 Dumfries Music Club appointed him as their Hon. Composer-in-Residence.

His output so far is mainly instrumental, for anything from piano solo to large orchestra, and has been performed – internationally (Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, India, Italy, Japan, Mallorca, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sri Lanka, USA) as well as throughout Britain and on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM – by artists such as the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble, the Joachim Piano Trio, and Kathryn Stott. Competition successes include 2nd place in the Purcell Composition Prize in 1995 (Fantasy on SCRiABin for piano), 1st in the Surrey Sinfonietta Composers' Workshop in 2000 (Sonatina No. 2 for clarinet & piano), and the Judges' Prize in the Oare String Orchestra's 2012 Composing Competition (Concertino for viola & string orchestra) (the judges included violist Martin Outram and composer John McCabe).

In July 2002 he was a featured composer at the Victoria International Arts Festival, Gozo (Malta), with seven performances and a pre-concert talk, all broadcast on local radio. In 2004 he was commissioned to write a Fanfare to open the Dumfries & Galloway Silver Arts Festival. In 2006 Murray McLachlan recorded a CD of his complete solo piano music for the Dunelm label – reissued in 2014 on Divine Art's *Diversions* label. In 2009 his Two Serenades for violin, clarinet, cello & piano were chosen for inclusion in the London Schubert Players' EU-funded Invitation to Composers project, with performances in Edinburgh, Paris and Namsos (Norway), as well as a CD recording released in December 2011. This recording was reissued by Nimbus in November 2012 as part of a 3-CD set entitled *A European Odyssey*.

In January 2017 Aberdeen University's new Vox Regis label issued Lesley Wilson's CD entitled "A Much-Travel'd Clown: Premiere Recordings of Scottish Bassoon Music". Among the eight items are two by Marcus, including *Lorenzo the Much-Travel'd Clown* for bassoon & piano.

<http://www.scottishmusiccentre.com/member-profiles/marcus-blunt/>

THE PERFORMERS

“Murray McLachlan is a pianist with a virtuoso technique and a sure sense of line. His timing and phrasing are impeccable, and his tone-full but unforced in the powerful passages, gentle and restrained in the more lyrical- is a perpetual delight” (BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE)

Since making his professional debut in 1986 at the age of 21 under the baton of Sir Alexander Gibson, **Murray McLachlan** has consistently received outstanding critical acclaim. Educated at Chetham’s School of Music and Cambridge University, his mentors included Ronald Stevenson, David Hartigan, Ryszard Bakst, Peter Katin and Norma Fisher. His recording career began in 1988 and immediately attracted international attention. Recordings of contemporary music have won numerous accolades, including full star ratings, as well as ‘rosette’ and ‘key recording’ status in the Penguin Guide to CDs, and ‘Disc of the month’ and ‘Record of the month’ in ‘Music on the web’ and ‘The Herald’.

McLachlan’s discography now includes over forty commercial recordings, including the complete sonatas of Beethoven, Myaskovsky and Prokofiev, the six concertos of Alexander Tcherepnin, the 24 Preludes and Fugues of Rodion Shchedrin, Ronald Stevenson’s ‘Passacaglia on DSCH’ the major works of Kabalevsky, Khatchaturian and the complete solo piano music of Erik Chisholm.

McLachlan’s repertoire includes over 40 concertos and 25 recital programmes. He has performed the complete Beethoven piano sonata cycle six times, as well as the complete piano music of Brahms. He has given first performances of works by many composers, including Martin Butler, Ronald Stevenson, Charles Camilleri, Michael Parkin and even Beethoven! He has appeared as soloist with most of the leading UK orchestras. His recognition has been far-reaching, bringing invitations to perform on all five continents. At the same time he continues to give numerous concerts and master classes in the UK.

McLachlan teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music and at Chetham’s School of Music in Manchester where he has been Head of Keyboard since 1997. He is the founder of the Manchester International Concerto competition for young pianists as well as the Founder/Artistic Director of the world famous Chetham’s International Summer school and festival for Pianists, Europe’s largest summer school devoted exclusively to the piano. As a teacher McLachlan continues to be very busy and in demand. Many of his students have won prizes in competitions and continued with their own successful careers as performers.

Murray McLachlan is Chair of the both the executive council and the UK section of the European Piano Teachers’ Association (EPTA UK). As well as performing and teaching, he is well known internationally for his numerous articles on Piano technique and repertoire. This includes extended columns which have appeared in ‘International Piano’ ‘Pianist’ and ‘Piano’ Magazines. He was editor of ‘Piano Professional’ Magazine from 2007-14. He is currently editor of Piano Journal. His books for Faber, ‘Foundations of Piano Technique’ and ‘Piano Technique in Practice’, were issued in 2014 and 2015 to wide acclaim.

In 2012 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Dundee for outstanding services to music and education. This follows on from a knighthood awarded in 1997 by the Order of St John of Jerusalem in recognition of his services to music in Malta. Murray McLachlan is artistic director of the Camel House Concerts in Lanzarote, Vice President of the North East of Scotland Music School and a patron of the Beethoven Piano Society of Europe and the Grampian Region Youth Orchestra.

www.murraymclachlan.com

Lesley Wilson took up the bassoon at the age of thirteen, when three of her school friends were starting to learn the flute, oboe and clarinet. She was a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain before entering the Royal Academy of Music as a student of the world-renowned bassoonist, Gwydion Brooke.

She played principal bassoon with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra for over twenty-six years while also teaching, adjudicating and coaching at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the Royal Northern College of Music and for three months as a visiting professor at Ball State University, Indiana, USA. Busy also as a soloist and in chamber ensembles, she coached for the National Youth Orchestras of both Scotland and Wales.

Since moving to Aberdeen to join the team of peripatetic teachers as a woodwind instructor, Lesley has been a member of Aberdeen Sinfonietta, a visiting tutor at the North-East of Scotland Music School, the Aberdeen City Music School, the University of Aberdeen, and woodwind coach for the Grampian Youth Orchestra.

Her CD of bassoon solo and chamber music written in Scotland between 1958 and 2015, "A Much-Travel'd Clown", was released in 2017 (Vox Regis).

It was in the late 1980s, as a review writer for Double Reed News, the quarterly magazine of the British Double Reed Society, that Lesley first encountered the music of Marcus Blunt and began to include it in recitals; now, as ever, she remains captivated by it.

Stephen Threlfall's current role as Director of Music at Chetham's School of Music, the UK's leading music school, is a happy culmination of many years' experience in the professional music world. An alumnus of the Royal Northern College of Music, Stephen's career took him first to the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, where he was Sub-Principal Cello, before becoming Director of Music at Benenden School. At the same time, his reputation as a conductor and educator was growing rapidly.

As a conductor, Stephen has earned much acclaim for his performances, recordings and broadcasts. He has conducted at many major venues and festivals in the UK and with many international solo artists. Engagements have taken him to the USA, Europe and Scandinavia, with regular visits to the Urals Philharmonic and Bach Orchestras in Yekaterinburg, the Royal Oman Symphony and Amman Symphony Orchestras. Other ensembles include Leeds Festival, Chester Bach and Manchester Chamber Choirs; the Northern Ballet and Northern Chamber Orchestra, Manchester Camerata and the BBC Philharmonic. He has conducted a number of concert broadcasts for the BBC, Classic FM and Russian national Radio and TV, and his repertoire includes many world premieres, notably *High on the Slopes of Terror* by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. Stephen made his Royal Festival Hall debut in February 2012 in an all Rachmaninov programme.

Stephen combines a natural sense for performance with his creative vision to inspire the artistic direction and programming of concerts, festivals and educational events. He has a passion for working with young people and has enjoyed successful collaborations with many student and youth orchestras both at home and abroad.

He has created and directed a number of arts and community projects involving an impressive number of guest musicians, artists and specialists. In autumn 2008, the Leonard Bernstein Celebration included chamber and symphonic concerts. In autumn 2012, Stephen directed a 4-day celebration to mark the 150th anniversary of Frederick Delius. In 2013 Stephen devised a major project marking the centenary of Benjamin Britten. The 'Russian October' project marking the centenary of the 1917 Revolution took place around Manchester in the autumn of 2017.

Stephen has collaborated with an array of outstanding classical artists, and with a number of actors and entertainers including Timothy West and Prunella Scales, Robbie Coltrane, Vanessa Redgrave, Bridget Forsyth, Hinge and Bracket, Ted Robbins, Emily Watson, Russell Grant and Celia Imrie.

Stephen's performances of Mahler's Third Symphony in July 2015 with the mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly and the Chetham's Symphony Orchestra were both highly praised. Recent performances include conducting the Transylvania State Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, concerts in Melbourne, Australia, and a return visit to Russia, Oman and the USA planned for 2018. He also devised the celebratory opening weekend of concerts and events to mark the opening of The Stoller Hall at Chetham's School of Music in April 2017 which received a 5-star review.

Manchester Camerata is one of Britain's leading chamber orchestras. It was founded by BBC producer Ralph Gonley in 1972; after several years of funding from Greater Manchester Council it became an autonomous organization in 1979. Its home venue is Manchester's Bridgwater Hall but the orchestra also presents concerts in many English towns and has been an annual participant in the Rasiguères Festival in Perpignan, France.

The orchestra is renowned for its sterling community work especially in its work with dementia patients. Its exciting programming has won many accolades {"Probably Britain's most adventurous orchestra" – *The Times*) and was voted Ensemble of the Year in the 2017 RPS Music Awards. A subgroup, Manchester Camerata Ensemble, performs chamber music to great acclaim and has appeared on a previous *Métier* recording.

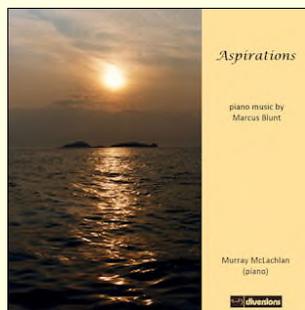


MURRAY MCLACHLAN

LESLEY WILSON



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The Piano Music of Marcus Blunt

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Seven Preludes
Iona Prelude and Caprice
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Prelude on a fugue theme by JS Bach

MURRAY McLACHLAN piano

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"Blunt displays a fertile imagination and is served in exemplary fashion by the indefatigable Murray McLachlan. Magical performance... A fascinating introduction to a composer whose music deserves wider currency; recommended." – *Fanfare*

"Works of real depth and substance ... brilliantly played by McLachlan. Blunt is extremely lucky in his pianist Murray McLachlan who does so much to bring out all the beauties and attractions of these works. The recording is excellent and there are booklet notes by the composer." – *The Classical Reviewer*



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**MARCUS
BLUNT**