

# RAPTURES

Stuart Hancock

Jack Liebeck, *violin*  
BBC Concert Orchestra  
Levon Parikian



ORCHID CLASSICS

## **RAPTURES**

Stuart Hancock, *composer*

1 **Variations on a Heroic Theme** 5.54

### **Concerto for Violin and Orchestra**

2 I. Andante maestoso – Andante semplice 15.01

3 II. Andante tranquillo 9.49

4 III. Finale: Allegro eroico 7.32

### **Raptures – Suite for Orchestra**

5 I. Fathom 5.36

6 II. Rush 4.38

7 III. Lullaby 3.30

8 IV. Serpent 4.04

9 V. Rapture 4.08

**Total time** **60.24**

Jack Liebeck, *violin*

BBC Concert Orchestra

Levon Parikian, *conductor*

Stuart Hancock's ***Variations on a Heroic Theme*** is conceived as a flamboyant celebratory overture. It was commissioned by the Radcliffe Trust for the Rehearsal Orchestra on its 50th Anniversary and workshopped in open rehearsal at the orchestra's residential Edinburgh course in August 2007 led by conductor Lev Parikian. The piece is now set to receive its world premiere on November 30th 2019 with the Bridgewater Sinfonia, Berkhamsted, conducted by Steven Joyce Myall. After a short arresting introduction, the eponymous lion-hearted theme is presented by the brass and proceeds to enjoy increasingly exuberant variations showcasing various sections of the orchestra. This suddenly flicks into a deceptively dainty waltz episode with whirling woodwind solos, before flowing into a tranquil central variation featuring lyrical writing for strings, solo cor anglais and trumpet. Fugal woodwind figures bounce off this as the pace picks up again, building to a thrilling climactic variation of the theme with all guns blazing, bringing to a close this spirited orchestral showpiece.

The ***Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*** was written for soloist Paul Barrett and the 2005 Southbank Sinfonia season of Rush Hour concerts at St John's Waterloo, London. It features a large orchestration and approaches the conventional three-movement concerto form with grand ambition. The declamatory G major orchestral introduction calms for the entrance of the soloist, who begins with a soft melancholy principal theme in G minor. The theme is morphed gently as the orchestration builds around it, with the soloist accompanying with triplet figures. The grandly romantic theme of the orchestral introduction returns, with the solo violin treating it with florid virtuosity before the thematic material is developed with increasing pace and intensity in a long structured crescendo. In contrast, the soloist's cadenza is introverted and more reflective on the exertions that have gone before, until the orchestra creeps back in and builds the texture once more. Serenity ultimately prevails in an ethereal coda in A-flat major that drifts away with the soloist's harmonics.

The scene is set for a hymn-like opening to the middle movement, led by the solo cor anglais and developing with the twelve woodwinds and harp. The mood remains calm with the solo violin's entry, but there is a fragility to the orchestral textures and the sense of yearning and passion is simmering close to the surface. The hymn-like theme returns, led by the soloist, developing into a noble climactic release in G major for the full orchestra. The movement concludes reflectively as the soloist rekindles the yearning principal theme of the first movement, accompanied by solo strings, cor anglais and harp.

The exuberant finale bursts through immediately as the solo violinist proclaims the phrases of a valiant main theme that toys with 3/4 and 6/8 meters. The tutti orchestra sings it back, and we then dance through a series of vivacious rondo episodes. These include virtuosic displays of left-hand pizzicato for the soloist, the hymn-theme of the second movement reappearing as an unruffled waltz, and a blaring jazzy variation in 9/8, all muted brass and syncopation. The action is suddenly interrupted by the more serious business of a fugue that hints at material from the opening movement – the yearning theme of which soars through again with the solo violin. We build dramatically back to the home key of G major, and it's the hymn-theme that provides the concerto's final noble reprise, before the soloist reintroduces the running patterns of the rondo theme in playful mood to lead the merry dance to a close.

**Raptures** is a picturesque five-movement orchestral suite. The movements are contrasting but connected by recurring themes and motifs, in particular the 4-note sequence C-D-F-E, as heard in the tranquil opening of *Fathom*. A glassy, watery texture is evoked, as deep pizzicato basses and harp send gentle ripples through the flute, strings and bowed crotales, before a solo violin sings a soaring lyrical melody above. *Rush* is virtually the opposite and crashes in full of angst and paranoia in its jagged themes and nervous muted trumpet figures. In *Lullaby*, the shape of the 4-note motif is hinted at again, as a distant clock

chimes. The solo flute plays a simple innocent melody, representing a mother singing her baby to sleep. Meanwhile, the *Serpent* of the fourth movement is sinuous and seductive and rather comical, developing its chromatic theme into increasingly delirious waltzes. The finale is a jocular affair – entitled simply *Rapture* – opening with the strings employing ‘bariolage’ arpeggios (topped with the C-D-F-E motif) to evoke an unbridled stomping happiness. Colourful themes whirl past, including reprises of material from all four previous movements. The action pauses briefly before a measured, sober chorale builds the 4-note motif into a towering climax (replicating that of the opening movement) and the suite closes with a final rousing flourish of the bariolage theme.



## **CELEBRATING A RARE EARTH**

### **Donald Sturrock on Stuart Hancock**

I first met Stuart at a concert in London at St John's, Smith Square in 2006. I had gone there to see a Roald Dahl adaptation of my own. But it was another work on the evening's programme that unexpectedly excited me: a setting of sinister nursery rhymes entitled *Bitter Suite*, written for orchestra and a trio of female voices. Backstage afterwards, I asked the conductor, Lev Parikian, about its composer, Stuart Hancock. "Ask him yourself," Lev responded. "He's next door. He's been playing in the viola section." I walked down the corridor and introduced myself. Thus began a friendship and a collaboration between Stuart and myself that would result in two children's operas and hopefully more works to come.

Stuart is one of those rare earths of the world of classical music. He makes his living not by teaching, but actually by composing. In that sense he's in a direct line from Mozart, Beethoven and the romantic composers he adores. Like them, he has an extraordinarily broad range of gifts. He is intelligent, responsive to text, and has a natural sense of melody and drama. His musical language varies, but there is always an appealing surface, while there is a natural ease to everything he does. Nothing is ever forced. He's got a sense of humour too. And he delivers his commissions on time – something that is not as common among composers as you might imagine. Consequently he's had a very successful career in the world of advertising, film and television – winning countless awards and accolades. However, to confine Stuart in this context is to underestimate him, as this recording of his orchestral concert music shows.

His love of John Williams's film music is certainly evident in his *Variations on a Heroic Theme*. In fact Stuart, who grew up in the 1980s, reckons that Williams's scores and those for his adventure movies like *E.T.*, *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* in particular were probably the first pieces of music that registered in his young

imagination. *Variations* was commissioned by the Rehearsal Orchestra for their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007. The conductor was Stuart's long-time friend and collaborator, Lev Parikian.

The *Violin Concerto* was composed two years earlier for soloist Paul Barrett and the Southbank Sinfonia. According to Stuart the commission was "proposed over a few pints in the pub." Aside from his two operas, it is the biggest single piece he has yet composed, scored for a large orchestra, including triple woodwind, and featuring long unbroken arches of sound. It is a wistful neo-romantic work whose opening movement with its long violin cadenza is reminiscent of the soundworld of Stuart's compatriots Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams. The concerto has a traditional three movement structure, with woodwinds coming to the fore in the middle movement; while the triumphant finale, an extended festive dance with another heroic theme, reminds us again of Stuart's love for grand romantic gestures and the stirring energy of his favourite movie composers, John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith and Alan Silvestri. Talking to Stuart about the concerto, it is clear it occupies a very special place in his heart.

Its pastoral beauty and tempered passion gives the concerto a very English feel, but it was the Russians, "with their lyrical themes and yearning melodies" who were another early inspiration for Stuart. He recalls being thrilled by Prokofiev's film scores for *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*, but also remembers imagining the brilliant movie soundtracks Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov might have composed, had they too had the opportunity to write for movies. Mahler was an influence on Stuart too, as were the French masters, Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy, with their "smoky orchestrations," alongside George Gershwin, who "added jazz into the mix." You can sense a bit of all of their voices in Stuart's orchestral writing, which is a rich blend of the romantic, the melancholy, the subversive and the downright cheeky.

Stuart was born in Chigwell, Essex and was first drawn to composing when, as a five-year-old he was fascinated by his elder brother learning the guitar. Captivated by the notes and symbols on the page, Stuart remembers “tinkering around” with the guitar after the lesson, picking out tunes and trying to notate them himself. By the age of nine, he was doing well at the piano, had written music for his school class production of *Beowulf* and was soon playing viola in Redbridge Schools Symphony Orchestra. But music was still only a hobby. Before taking up a place at Downing College Cambridge to read geography, he won a scholarship year at Pomona College in California, where he had “a fabulous time... throwing myself into all sorts of music-making.” There he premiered compositions with the college orchestra and wrote his first score for a student feature film. At Cambridge, music remained a hobby alongside his academic work as a geographer. Then the ‘light-bulb’ moment occurred. At the back of a Proms programme, Stuart saw an advert for a one-year post-graduate course at the London College of Music in composition for film and TV. He applied, was accepted and, soon after graduating, landed a full-time composing job with a music production company in Soho. He was away.

Since that first meeting in 2006, I have followed Stuart's career with great interest. I have also been lucky enough to work with him as writer on two children's operas: *Rain Dance* (2010) and *The Cutlass Crew* (2017). In almost everything I have seen and heard him compose, I have the sense of an artist focusing his talent on his work in an intensely honest, heartfelt, sometimes almost childlike way. The results can seem almost breathtakingly effortless, but their effect can be truly powerful. I feel certain he can be a very successful song-writer because of his ability to respond to poetry and identify with its soul. He also has an amazing gift of melody and expression.

*Raptures* (2019) was originally conceived as a quartet for violin, flute, viola and cello. Each of the five short movements are compressed elucidations

of a single idea. Now expanded onto a broader symphonic canvas, the title of each episode comes from words that Stuart remembers reading in a collection of Sylvia Plath poetry from his school days. The first of them, *Fathom*, is marked “slow and tranquil, like smooth ripples of water.” It is followed by the fast and agitated *Rush*. Half-way through there is an interlude of calm, before the energetic tempo picks up again and a sense of angst and panic returns. *Lullaby* is a gentle minuet, with tubular bells represent a chiming clock, as a mother sings to her baby. *Serpent* by contrast is marked “slow and seductive” as a languid bassoon slithers into a madcap and irregular landscape. Stuart confesses that this snake is “more like Kaa in Kipling’s *Jungle Book* than anything truly sinister,” commenting with a smile that while Sylvia Plath’s snake was dead, his one is “very much alive.” *Rapture* by contrast is marked “fast and ecstatic”. It is a joyous, festive finale, which brings back themes from some of the earlier movements. Stuart describes its mood as “stupidly happy... jumping-in-puddles happiness.”

There aren’t many composers today who can create that feeling. Thankfully, Stuart is able to do it with ease. It is one of the reasons he can write so much, and why I feel certain his career as a concert composer will blossom in tandem with his commercial work. He has ambitions to write a ballet and more opera is on the cards. I, for one, cannot wait to hear them.

**Donald Sturrock is an award-winning film-maker and author and has written six opera librettos**



Paul Hancock

## **STUART HANCOCK, Composer**

“Wall-to-wall, grade-A quality material.... an emotional score that should be listened to as loud as you think you can get away with without annoying the neighbours.”

(*One Night In Turin* soundtrack, reviewed by Darren Rea, Review Graveyard)

British Composer Award-winner Stuart Hancock studied at Downing College Cambridge and the London College of Music, and has forged a successful career as a composer versatile in all media, be it concert composition, theatre, commercial, film or TV scoring. From 1999 to 2005, he was an in-house composer with a Soho production company, where his focus was on commercial and TV music, winning considerable industry recognition for his work with a Gold Award from the Art Directors Club of New York (for *Burberry 'Rain'*) and a British Advertising and Television Craft Award (for *BBFC 'The Unknown'*).

He has since scored several films and TV series, including *London's Burning* (ITV), *The Lampies* (BBC), the World Cup drama-documentary *One Night In Turin* (2010) and, in 2014-15, the hit BBC fantasy drama *Atlantis*. He scored the E4/Netflix cult comedy-horror *Crazyhead* (2016) and wrote and conducted the multi-award-winning score to *We're Going On A Bear Hunt*, the animated film version of the popular children's bedtime book of the same name which premiered on Channel 4 on Christmas Eve 2016 to a consolidated audience of 8 million. Stuart now conducts the live orchestral performances of the *Bear Hunt* score to family audiences internationally.

Stuart won the Jerry Goldsmith Award for Best Composer in 2013, the ASCAP Foundation Harold Arlen Film & TV Award in 2014, and his BASCA British Composer Award in 2015 for the community song-cycle *Snapshot Songs*. The work was performed at the Barbican Centre's Milton Court Concert Hall and was praised by the judging panel as “often very touching and always beautifully



poetic” and “a wonderful concept brilliantly pulled off”. Other concert pieces include concerti, chamber works, and the comic cantata *Choir Straits* performed by the Bath Camerata with Kit & the Widow at Wigmore Hall in 2009. Recent commissions have included a competition piece for the London Accordion Orchestra and his second youth opera *The Cutlass Crew* with librettist Donald Sturrock, which was staged by W11 Opera in Hammersmith in December 2017.

Stuart has released nine soundtrack albums to date, including *Atlantis* (Silva Screen Records), *Crazyhead* (MovieScore Media) and *We're Going On A Bear Hunt* (Sony Classical), to many glowing reviews: “*This album is packed to bursting with original themes. Hancock proves that his work is up there with the best that Hollywood has to offer. Expect great things from him in the future*” [Darren Rea, Review Graveyard]. *Raptures* is his debut release in the field of classical music. Future performances of the works presented here are confirmed, with *Variations on a Heroic Theme* being premiered with the Bridgewater Sinfonia in Berkhamsted (November 30th 2019) and the *Violin Concerto* to be performed by Jack Liebeck at Cadogan Hall on February 29th 2020.

“Hancock displays a gift for sumptuous melodies that are strikingly attractive, rendered into a lavish sonority... Instantly appealing, this is a thoroughly captivating melodious soundscape that is luxurious and alive in stimulating musicality.”

(*The Desert Treasure* soundtrack, reviewed by BuySoundtrax.com)

[www.stuarthancock.com](http://www.stuarthancock.com)



## **JACK LIEBECK**

Violinist and festival director Jack Liebeck, possesses “*flawless technical mastery*” and a “*beguiling silvery tone*” (BBC Music Magazine). Jack’s playing embraces the worlds of elegant chamber-chic Mozart through to the impassioned mastery required to frame Brett Dean’s *The Lost Art of Letter Writing*. His fascination with all things scientific has led to his most recent collaboration, *A Brief History of Time*, with Professor Brian Cox and Daniel Harding. This new violin concerto was commissioned for Jack by

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra from regular collaborator and composer Paul Dean, and is written in commemoration of Professor Stephen Hawking.

In the 25 years since his debut with the Hallé, Jack has worked with major international conductors and orchestras including Andrew Litton, Leonard Slatkin, Karl-Heinz Steffens, Sir Mark Elder, Sakari Oramo, Vasily Petrenko, Brett Dean

(Royal Stockholm Philharmonic), Daniel Harding (Swedish Radio), Jukka Pekka Saraste (Oslo Philharmonic), David Robertson (St Louis Symphony), Jakub Hrůša and many orchestras across the world including Belgian National, Queensland Symphony, Moscow State Symphony, Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia, Indianapolis Symphony and all of the UK orchestras.

Jack is the artistic director of his own festivals Oxford May Music, the DESY Humboldt Science and Music Series in Hamburg (at Elb Philharmonie and the university), and Alpine Classics in Grindelwald, Switzerland where programming is centred around themes of music, science and the arts.

Jack plays the 'Ex-Wilhelmj' J.B. Guadagnini dated 1785 and is generously loaned a Joseph Henry bow by Kathron Sturrock in the memory of her late husband Professor David Bennett. Jack Liebeck is managed worldwide by Percius.

[www.percius.co.uk](http://www.percius.co.uk)

### **LEVON PARIKIAN**

Lev Parikian juggles parallel careers as conductor and writer. He is Principal Conductor of several London-based orchestras and the City of Oxford Orchestra. He is also Artistic Director of the Rehearsal Orchestra. He has worked extensively with students and youth orchestras, including the Royal Holloway University of London, where he also taught conducting for many years. Lev conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra in a rerecording of the theme tune for *Hancock's Half Hour* for *The Missing Hancocks* on BBC Radio 4.

Lev studied conducting with Michael Rose and David Parry, and at the Canford Summer School with George Hurst. He then pursued his studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire with the great Russian teacher Ilya Musin.

Lev's first book, *Waving, Not Drowning*, was described as 'a must-read' by Classical Music magazine, while the Times Literary Supplement called his



second, *Why Do Birds Suddenly Disappear?* 'good-hearted and well made, funny and clever.' *The Long and the Short of It*, a collection of 40 essays on subjects suggested by readers, will be published in August 2020.

[www.levparikian.wordpress.com](http://www.levparikian.wordpress.com)



## **BBC CONCERT ORCHESTRA**

**Bramwell Tovey**, *Principal Conductor*

**Keith Lockhart**, *Chief Guest Conductor*

**Barry Wordsworth**, *Conductor Laureate*

The mission of the BBC Concert Orchestra is to bring inspiring musical experiences to everyone, everywhere, with the ensemble's great versatility as the key. The orchestra can be heard regularly on BBC Radio 2's *Friday Night Is Music Night* and for BBC Radio 3 it profiles classical masterpieces in an entertaining way. The orchestra has performed on many TV soundtracks, including the original *Blue Planet* and *Serengeti*, as well as being seen courtside for *The No.1 Court Celebration* from Wimbledon.

The BBC Concert Orchestra performs each year at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall, and plays a central role in the Last Night celebrations alongside a

host of musical stars at Proms in the Park in Hyde Park. As an Associate Orchestra at the Southbank Centre the BBC CO gives a number of performances there each year, offering audiences a huge range of choice including classical music, exciting collaborations, jazz, celebrations of musical theatre and live accompaniment of cinema classics.

Along with its regular engagements throughout the UK, the BBC Concert Orchestra has toured internationally to China, Japan, Sweden, Abu Dhabi and coast to coast in the USA.

The BBC Concert Orchestra has an exciting programme of learning work, engaging people of all ages with a wide range of music and projects, including the BBC's Ten Pieces.

[www.bbc.co.uk/concertorchestra](http://www.bbc.co.uk/concertorchestra)



**1st VIOLINS**

Nathaniel Anderson-Frank (leader)  
Charles Mutter  
Peter Bussereau  
Lucy Hartley  
Cormac Browne  
Juan Gonzalez  
Rustom Pomeroy  
Miranda Allen  
Zanete Uskane  
Sam Wickramasinghe  
Kate Cole  
Marina Gillam

**2nd VIOLINS**

Michael Gray  
Matthew Elston  
Marcus Broome  
David Beaman  
Daniel Mullin  
Anna Ritchie  
Anna Croad  
Matthew Batty  
Ikuko Sunamura  
Nicola Gleed  
Claire Parkin  
Julia Stewart

**VIOLAS**

Timothy Welch  
Nigel Goodwin  
Helen Knief  
Mike Biggs  
Judit Keleman  
Ania Ullmann  
Duncan Anderson  
Elisa Bergersen  
Emily Frith

**CELLOS**

Benjamin Hughes  
Matthew Lee  
Josephine Abbott  
Ben Rogerson  
Jane Lindsay  
Mariam Lowbury

**DOUBLE BASSES**

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Andrew Wood  
Stacey-Ann Miller  
Nicola Davenport

**FLUTES**

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Alyson Frazier  
Kate Walter

**OBOES**

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Victoria Walpole  
Nicola Holland

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Andy Harper  
Harry Cameron-Penny

**BASSOONS**

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Rachel Simms  
Jane Gaskell

**HORNS**

Mark Johnson  
Tom Rumsby  
Marcus Bates  
David Wythe  
Richard Dilley

**TRUMPETS**

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David McCallum  
John Blackshaw  
Alex Cromwell

**TROMBONES**

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David Stewart  
Richard Whitehead  
Mark Frost

**TUBA**

Sasha Koushk-Jalali

**TIMPANI**

Marney O'Sullivan

**PERCUSSION**

Stephen Whibley  
Ian Cape  
Olly Yates  
Bobby Ball  
Chris Blundell

**HARP**

Deian Rowlands

## **THANK YOU**

I have many people to thank – not least the talented musicians who commissioned these pieces in the first place, placing trust in what I would come up with and allowing me to write the sort of music that I would want to listen to myself. These pieces were written for them but also inspired by them. Violinist Paul Barrett, the original dedicatee of the concerto, is a case in point: just like me, Paul's an unashamed romantic and one who can channel that passion into my notes and turn them into something magical and, for a want of a better word, rapturous. Thanks to the brilliant Jack Liebeck for believing in the concerto as well, for taking it on and making it his own.

The BBC Concert Orchestra (and their management team) put their faith in me and my music too, and performed it magnificently in our recording sessions at Watford. I couldn't have asked for a kinder, more brilliant group of musicians and I hope I get the chance to work with them again in the future. Similar thanks to Matthew Trusler at Orchid Classics for taking this album release on, for his good advice and guidance through the process – and to Martyn Pick for creating the sensational artwork that graces the album cover.

And most of all, to my friend, maestro and hero-of-the-hour Lev Parikian who helmed these recordings and who has championed my music for many years and given it a voice in so many concert performances. You are a legend – thank you.

Stuart Hancock

Recorded at Watford Colosseum, London, June 25th & 27th 2019

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Recording assistant: Katie Earl

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