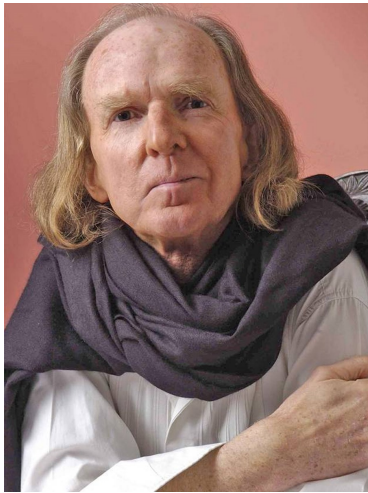


Contemporary English Music

An NSU Faculty Recital by Paul Christopher, cello

Assisted by Francis Yang, piano; Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer, NSU Alumnus

This evening's recital by NSU professor of cello Paul Christopher and assisted by professor of piano Francis Yang presents the music of four contemporary British composers. Not one of the four works heard this evening is any older than thirty years, and two of the composers are in fact still alive and actively writing new music. The first piece we hear is by **Sir John Tavener (1944-2013)** who often drew inspiration for



Sir John Tavener

his music from his participation in Orthodox Christianity as well as his fascinations with Byzantine chant and the cultures of Greece and Russia. About the time of his conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1977, Tavener began speaking of his compositions as “icons in sound,” a comparison to the paintings so characteristic of Orthodox Christianity which depict Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, or other religious figures. Tavener has remarked, “I see music as ‘a window of sound’ on to the divine world,” and like painted icons, Tavener’s sound icons speak of a different time and place through their unsophisticated yet stunningly beautiful imagery.

Tavener’s 1990 composition for solo cello *Thrinós* takes its name from a Greek word meaning “lament.” It was written following the death of a close friend, and Tavener instructs that the composition should be played “with great peace and serenity.” In imitation of Byzantine chant, the score follows simple contours, is unmeasured (no bar lines), and contains pitches that standard Western notation can only render as chromaticism and microtones. *Thrinós* was written for cellist Steven Isserlis who had premiered Tavener’s cello concerto *The Protecting Veil* a year earlier in September 1989.

With Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett, **Sir Malcolm Arnold (1921-2006)** is generally regarded as one of Great Britain’s key symphonic composers of the mid-twentieth century. Their music stands apart from the avant-garde that dominated Continental Europe at that time and found footholds among slightly younger countrymen like Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle. Although these three were certainly aware of their Modernist contemporaries and occasionally benefited from their ideas, their interests were mostly tonal. More often they found common ground with the music of composers like Gustav Mahler, Hector Berlioz, and Dmitri Shostakovich or earlier models,



Sir Malcolm Arnold

specifically those connected to their British heritage. Arnold especially enjoyed utilizing classical forms and genres, and – although he wrote symphonies, concerti, and sonatas – he also had a particular interest in the fantasy, a relatively free form with significantly less restrictions than the others. “Fantasy” was a title he gave to all of his chamber music for unaccompanied soloists as well as several pieces for more than one player. The Fantasy for cello, Op. 130 heard this evening is the latest of these fantasies for solo instruments. This cycle had begun in 1966 with his Fantasy for bassoon, Op. 86 and spawned a total of twelve such works, each for a different solo instrument. Like his concerti, several of the solo fantasies composed by Arnold were written either as gifts to friends or as tributes to other distinguished players.

Arnold wrote his Cello Fantasy in 1987 for the celebrated British cellist Julian Lloyd Webber – younger brother to the even more famous composer of such musical theatre hits as *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Cats*. Lloyd Webber gave the premiere on December 13, 1987 at London’s prestigious Wigmore Hall. Approximately sixteen minutes in length, the

Cello Fantasy is in seven brief sections, framed by an *Andantino*. The intervening variations hear the theme pass through a variety of moods and transformations, including a bouncy *Vivace*, its recasting as an exuberant march, and a frantic section dominated by *pizzicati*.

The year following the premiere of Arnold’s Cello Fantasy, the composer chose to write a full-scale concerto for Julian Lloyd Webber. Subtitled the *Shakespearean Concerto*, this work was – like his Cello Fantasy – Arnold’s final contribution to its genre.



Nigel Clarke

It was as a trumpeter in military bands that our next composer **Nigel Clarke (born 1960)** began his musical career. Spurred, however, by the music of New Polish School composers like Witold Lutosławski and Krzysztof Penderecki, Clarke began

studies at the Royal Academy of Music where he won such prestigious awards as the Josiah Parker Prize and the Queen's Commendation for Excellence. It has been said of Clarke's music that his "belief in very close collaboration with musicians and ensembles... leads to extremely brilliant writing, which, however physically challenging, is consistently gratifying for players and exciting for audiences." Although currently Clarke is known primarily for his wind band music, the French record label *Abeille Musique* has projected "Without doubt, we have here one of the great European composers of times to come: take good note of his name." Clarke's willingness to collaborate and his creativity have made his concert hall works well worth the listen, even if many critics have yet to catch on.

Clarke wrote *Spectroscope* for solo cello in 1987, the same year it was premiered at the Royal Academy of Music by its dedicatee cellist Philip Sheppard. Later that same year, the renowned American cellist Lynn Harrell gave its London debut at Wigmore Hall. This four-movement piece is named after the scientific instrument alternately called the spectroscope or optical spectrometer which is used to separate and analyze colors in the visible spectrum of light. Likewise, it is the composer's hope that – through his composition and the performer's realization – elements of sound will be similarly broken-down and made audible to the listener. The violinist Peter Sheppard Skærved – a friend and longtime collaborator with Clarke – has said of *Spectroscope* "The succinctness and near classical shaping of this work lend it an extraordinary grace, which belies the many technical innovations." The compositional language might well be difficult to realize in performance, but both Clarke and Sheppard Skærved seem confident that – if performed correctly – *Spectroscope* should be a rewarding and enjoyable experience for the listener.



David Matthews

The composer **David Matthews (born 1943)** like his younger brother Colin Matthews is perhaps best-known for his arrangements and completions of works by past masters. As young men, the two brothers worked with Deryck Cooke on his

completion of Mahler's unfinished Tenth Symphony. They also worked alongside Benjamin Britten during the final years of his life and since then have helped to maintain his legacy: while Colin has served as chair of the Britten Estate and Music Director of the Britten-Pears Foundation, David has written one of the authoritative biographies of this composer, simply titled *Britten*. As a composer, David Matthews has carried the language of Britten and Mahler into his own music as well as that of other recent British composers like Michael Tippett and Nicholas Maw. He has worked tirelessly in the classical genres of the symphony, concerto, string quartet, and lately the oratorio, producing a total of nine symphonies, another nine concerti, and thirteen numbered string quartets as of 2016. *Tempo* remarked of Matthews's music in 2008 that "few other living composers can deploy the classical virtues of clarity, tradition, and restraint to such cogent ends." His music has been graciously supported by the BBC: it has

been heard at their annual Proms, performed and recorded by their orchestras, and also nominated for their Listeners' Award.

David Matthews wrote this evening's *Dark Pastoral* in 2010 on a commission by the BBC. This eleven-minute piece which has been published as his Opus 112 is a completion of the slow movement of Ralph Vaughan Williams's unfinished Cello Concerto which he had sketched in 1942. Because Vaughan Williams had written only about four minutes of music in his original score and had done little work in terms of orchestration, much of the finished piece is by Matthews. The surviving sketches suggested to Matthews an unfinished ternary form (ABA) but – with only fragments left for the proposed B section – Matthews chose to elaborate upon the completed A section rather than expand upon the incomplete B material. *Dark Pastoral* in its version for cello and orchestra was premiered at the BBC Proms on September 5, 2010 by cellist Steven Isserlis and the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Paul Daniel. The BBC Music Magazine called *Dark Pastoral* a "wonderfully skilled and imaginative, yet always-in-style completion" when it was recorded in 2012.

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About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer is a composer, music scholar, and advocate of music. Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College located in Natchitoches, Louisiana in May 2013 after completing his undergraduate thesis "Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers." As series director of the successful Abendmusik Alexandria chamber music series from May 2014 to April 2016, Jackson played a vital role in the renewal of interest in chamber music across Central Louisiana. This interest has encouraged the creation of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival and the new series Nachtmusik von BrainSurge, both of which Jackson will remain active in as concert annotator and creative consultant. Jackson has in fact written program notes for many of Central Louisiana's key music presenters, including the Rapides Symphony Orchestra, Arts Council of Central Louisiana, and Northwestern State University. He also blogs at MusicCentral where he shares concert experiences, gives listening recommendations, posts interviews with contemporary composers, and offers insights into his own compositions. Jackson has followed classical music around the world, including trips to Colorado's Aspen Music Festival and the BachFest Leipzig in Germany. As a composer, he has worked to integrate a modern vocabulary into established classical forms in ways that are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. His four-movement Suite for solo guitar, Op. 21 received its world premiere on November 5, 2015 and has also been aired on public radio. In fall 2016, Jackson will begin graduate studies at the University of Louisville with the ultimate goal of earning his doctorate in musicology.



Read additional program notes by Jackson at
www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.