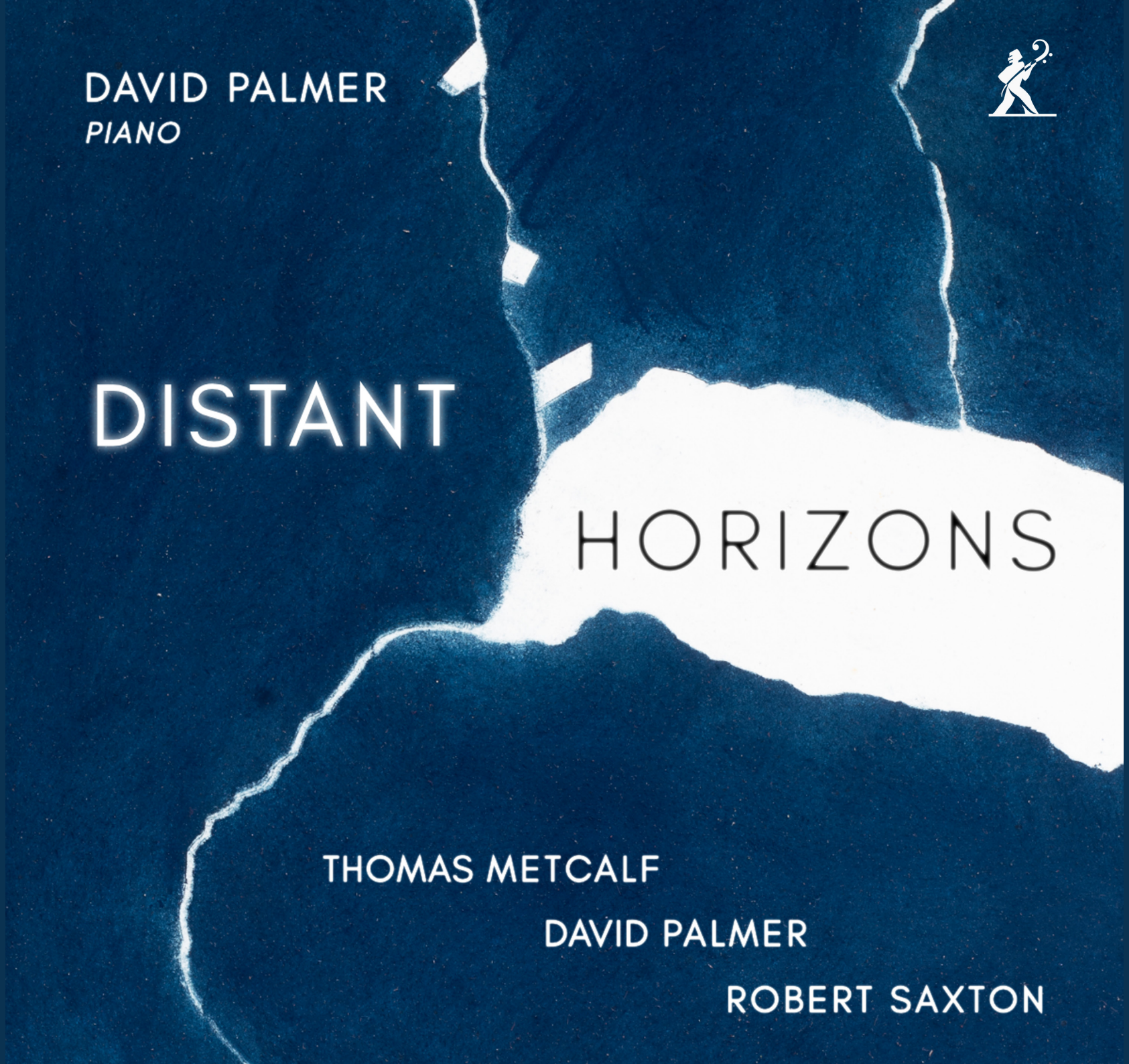

DAVID PALMER
PIANO
DISTANT
HORIZONS
THOMAS METCALF
DAVID PALMER
ROBERT SAXTON

DISTANT HORIZONS

THOMAS METCALF • DAVID PALMER • ROBERT SAXTON

	Robert Saxton	
	Distant Horizons (2024-2026)	
1.	I.	4:36
2.	II.	4:48
3.	III.	4:10
4.	IV.	5:08
5.	V.	5:15
6.	VI.	3:42
7.	VII.	5:33
	Thomas Metcalf	
	Arrays (2020-2021)	
8.	I. *...into the web...*	0:56
9.	II. *I hear arrays:*	3:01
10.	III. *Paths followed and forgotten, but*	2:50
11.	IV. *Still sounding. Sounding (un)clear*	1:57
12.	V. *Until nothings remain.*	3:35
13.	**Involuntary** (2025)	17:42
	David Palmer	
	Twine (2026)	
14.	I.	3:01
15.	II.	4:18

Total playing time 70:40

Introduction by Robert Saxton

David Palmer and Tom Metcalf were students of mine at Worcester College, Oxford immediately prior to my retirement in 2021 and both were outstanding, achieving First Class Honours degrees and, in Tom's case, proceeding to a DPhil. David went on to study under Ronan O'Hora and Rolf Hind at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he was awarded a major prize as a postgraduate pianist, also continuing to compose. He has recorded and performed internationally with his Pierrot Lunaire inspired-ensemble, Mad Song. Tom (now Dr) Metcalf is currently a Junior Research Fellow at New College, Oxford.

David Palmer, having generously invited me to write a piano work for him some time ago, initiated the recording project and is represented by his own new and innovative piece which demonstrates his ever-searching mind both as performer and composer. Tom Metcalf's two pieces are separated by some years and display his fascinating compositional journey of aesthetic and technical exploration at the service of his unwavering integrity of purpose.

I am delighted, and indeed proud, to be part of this recording and to introduce two younger colleagues whom I tutored. I also thank Liz Webb Management and Métier for their combined support for the recordings, Adaq Khan for his outstanding sound engineering and producing and New College, Oxford for providing the recording space.

Robert Saxton, May 2026

The Music

Robert Saxton: Distant Horizons (2024-2026)

Distant Horizons was commissioned by David Palmer (to whom it is dedicated) with generous funding from the Vaughan Williams Foundation and The Laurence Modiano Charitable Trust.

The cycle consists of seven movements, each addressing an aspect relating to the title, the latter only being decided during the compositional process (2024-26). The initial material is referred to in various ways throughout.

Movement 1: Active music with the matter of the horizontal/vertical relationship between micro and macro-levels, during which the piano's highest register gradually descends to its lowest. A natural is the pitch centre.

Movement 2: C is the focus of this still, sustained movement, from its initial lone iteration to its fulfilment as the root of a major triad, varying aural spotlights being shone on it as the music progresses.

Movement 3: The initial material of movement 1 is here heard decorated, interspersed with a brief homophonic 'chorale' which expands so that both textures and gestures are eventually heard simultaneously, before the music subsides, recalling its source. The pitch centre is E, the pitch centres of the first three movements having outlined an A minor triad.

Movement 4: A fast dance with characteristics of a rondo.

Movement 5: The second slow movement of the cycle. The deep, bell-like bass notes outline their own progression, while the melodic line above traces a slowly expanding interval pattern, the space between the two hands being another manifestation of distance.

Movement 6: Active, quick figuration articulates a slowly changing harmonic background. The dynamic is quiet throughout, the pitch centre being D.

Movement 7: Diatonic cluster chords over low bass notes are gradually heard closer to one another, the addition of a third layer in the highest register also being introduced as an elongated melodic line. The music becomes liquid until a change of metrical unit (not pulse) leads to the recapitulation of the chordal material in a more 'urgent' manner, heralding a coda which closes on a low E with the opening motif of the cycle heard at a pitch level above it which could resolve onto the opening bar of the cycle, reflecting another aspect of distance and possible return (or not).

David Palmer gave the first live performance at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford, on 2nd June 2026.

Thomas Metcalf: Arrays (2020-2021)

Arrays is a work that explores how a varyingly pixelated text can be used to create musical structure and material. The piece exists in five movements, one for each line of the self-authored text, that explore different ways in which one may interpret the 'pixel arrays' that are generated through pixelation, thus creating a playful interpretation of what 'word-setting' really entails. Characteristics such as pulse, rhythm, and density are linked to the visual representation, with elements of randomness used to create formal structures and pitch sets.

Arrays
I. *...into the web...*
II. *I hear arrays:*
III. *Paths followed and forgotten, but*
IV. *Still sounding. Sounding (un)clear*
V. *Until nothings remain.*

Arrays was premiered by David Palmer at the Jaqueline du Pré Music Building at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, on 6th May 2021. This work was highly commended by the jury of the Royal Musical Association's Tippett Medal (2023).

Thomas Metcalf: Involuntary (2025)

Involuntary is a work which explores the concept of involuntary musical imagery (INMI): the phenomenon known colloquially as an 'earworm', whereby a short musical loop plays repeatedly in one's mind. INMI has not been extensively studied, but the few empirical writings on it suggest that people can derive a range of functions from it. For me, however, earworms are almost always negative (known as 'negative valence') and related to stress, anxiety, and fatigue, able to cruelly turn my favourite music of the moment into something tormenting and annoying.

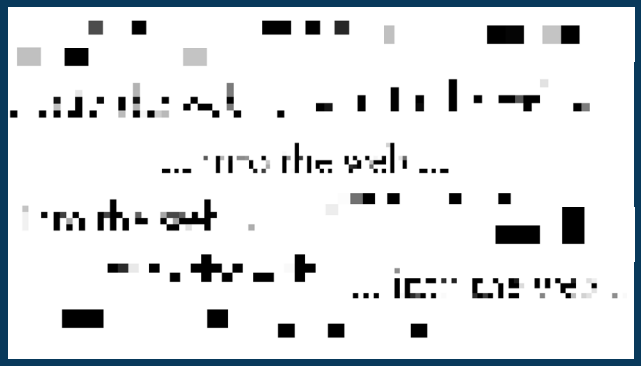
This work aims to translate my experiences of INMI into a single-movement work for piano. Rather than taking fragments from extant works, I chose to create the material organically (since the focus of my INMI shifts over time). Repetition takes centre stage in terms of structure, material, and gesture. Emerging from nothing, the piece is based on a 4-note tremolo cluster, instilling a sense of tension and agitation. Over the piece, fragments return, mutate, and proliferate, growing in intensity and exasperation until the point of rupture. The piece ends as it begins, a ghostly memory: transient, unclear and, whilst fading away to nothing, forebodingly emergent, as if the piece could begin again.

The title refers to the early modern genre of the keyboard voluntary, channelling aspects of organic development and improvisational writing. This, however, becomes disrupted by recurring musical fragments, as if straining to break free.

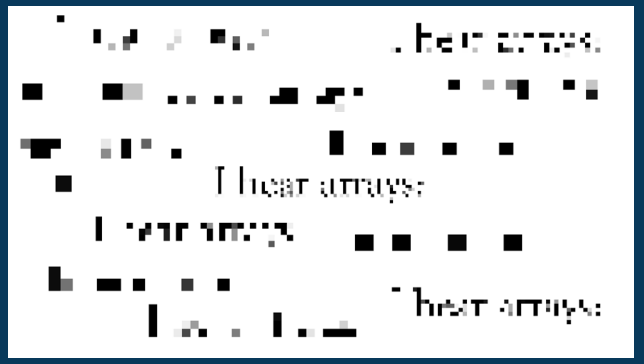
David Palmer: Twine (2026)

Twine takes its name from the method of its construction: multiple independent lines are intertwined to form a single composite strand. Situated almost entirely in the lower register of the piano, this short piece explores the gradual fraying of this tightly bound material. The first movement presents dense, rapid material that gradually disintegrates into sparser textures. A sense of repetition persists, though it remains obscured and difficult to grasp. The second movement focuses on the unravelling of a single pitch into elaborate ornamental lines. These lines are later shadowed by chords that seem to drift from their orbit.

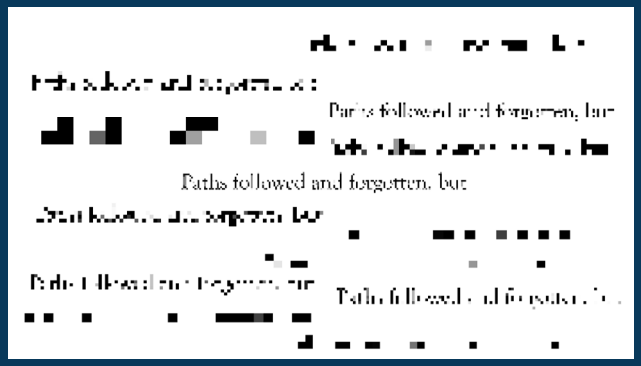
Arrays



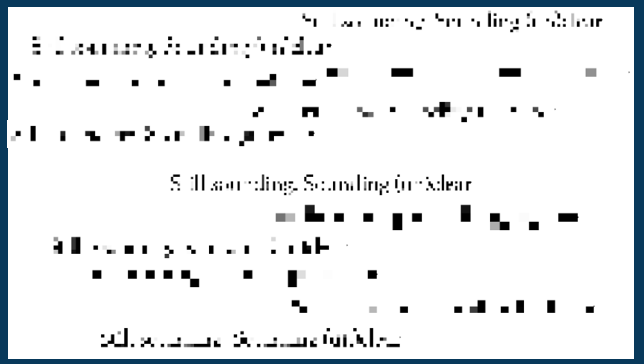
Arrays I. *...into the web...*



Arrays II. *I hear arrays:*



Arrays III. *Paths followed and forgotten, but*



Arrays IV. *Still sounding. Sounding (un)clear*



Arrays V. *Until nothings remain.*

Thomas Metcalf

Thomas Metcalf (b. 1996) is a musicologist and composer specialising in music, visual art, and intermediality. Tom's research uses an interdisciplinary approach incorporating visual studies, art history, and philosophy to consider ideas of representation in music since the nineteenth century. Tom studied at Worcester College, Oxford, as an undergraduate, and completed a DPhil in Music in 2021, supervised by Robert Saxton and Jonathan Cross. During this time, Tom also studied with Kenneth Hesketh and produced the first analytical article on his music, published in Tempo.

Since completing his doctorate, Tom has held positions at the Ashmolean Museum and The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh. During 2023-2024, he worked in the charity sector as Trusts and Foundations Manager for Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Tom is currently the Christopher Cox Junior Research Fellow at New College, Oxford, where he is completing a monograph, Photogenic Music, on art music and photography since 1839.



Tom's music explores aspects of intermediality, as well as incorporating ideas of glitch, failure, and anxiety. His work is recorded on NMC (National Youth Choir), Métier (Kreutzer Quartet), Herald (Worcester College Choir), and his quintet, *Photogenia*, will feature on Mad Song Ensemble's forthcoming debut album. Recently, Tom's music has received praise in Gramophone (for his work *Pixelating the River*) and The Observer (*Photogenia*).

Tom's research has been published widely, ranging from academic journal articles in Music Analysis, Music in Art, Tempo, and Leonardo, to book chapters published by Bloomsbury and Brill.

tmetcalf.co.uk

David Palmer

David Palmer (b. 1997) is a London-based composer and pianist specialising in 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. Alongside a busy performance schedule, David teaches at the University of Oxford, where he is a College Lecturer in Music at Keble College, and at the Royal College of Music Junior Department.

David studied piano with Rolf Hind and Ronan O'Hora on the Master's and Artist Diploma programmes at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he received the Deputy Chair's Prize and a Concert Recital Diploma for exceptional performance, before serving as a Junior Fellow at GSMD. David also read music at Oxford, where he was president of the music and chamber music societies, graduating with a first-class BA. He has studied composition with Richard Barrett, Robert Saxton and Matthew Sergeant.



David was a 2022-23 Britten Pears Young Artist, a 2024 Leeds Lieder Young Artist, and participated in the 2024 Ensemble Modern Young Ensemble Academy with Mad Song. With soprano Bridget Esler, David won three prizes at the 13th Nadia and Lili Boulanger International Voice-Piano Competition. David's repertoire includes concertos by Berg, Finnissy, Stravinsky and Xenakis, as well as major 20th-century piano works such as Boulez's *Second Sonata*, Nono's ..... *sofferte onde serene* ..., and Murail's *Territoires d'oubli*. David has appeared multiple times on BBC Radio 3.

davidpalmermusician.com

Robert Saxton

Robert Saxton (b 1953) studied with Elisabeth Lutyens, Robin Holloway and Luciano Berio, after early advice from Benjamin Britten. He read Music at Cambridge and was then a postgraduate at Oxford. He won First Prize in 1975 at the Gaudeamus Composition Competition in Holland and was a Visiting Fellow at Princeton USA as recipient of the Fulbright/Schirmer Award (1985-86).

He was Head of Composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Royal Academy of Music (London), then Professor of Composition at Oxford University and tutorial fellow in music at Worcester College until his retirement in 2021. He is an Hon Fellow at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, Hon Research Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music and has been Composer-in-Association at the Purcell School since 2013.

Selected commissions include works for the BBC (Proms, TV and radio), the ECO, ESO and Kenneth Woods, LSO, LPO, London Sinfonietta, Nash Ensemble, Opera North, St Paul's Sinfonia and Andrew Morley, Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Leeds, Lichfield and Presteigne festivals and for the Arditti, Chilingirian and Kreutzer string quartets, Richard Rodney Bennett and Susan Bradshaw, Teresa Cahill, Fidelio Piano Trio, Leon Fleisher, Clare Hammond, Steven Isserlis, Mstislav Rostropovich, Clerks Group, Christ Church Cathedral Oxford, Peter Sheppard Skærved, James Turnbull, John Wallace, and Raphael Wallfisch.



Recent major works include the opera *The Wandering Jew*, *Hortus Musicae* for solo piano, *Resurrection of the Soldiers* for string orchestra, and *Scenes from the Epic of Gilgamesh* for orchestra. Works are recorded on Sony Classical, EMI, Hyperion, NMC, Metier, and published by Wise Music, Ricordi (Berlin), UYMP and Viola Viva (Switzerland).

Robert is married to the soprano, Teresa Cahill.

robertsaxton.net

Recorded April 23-24 2026 at The New Space, New College, Oxford
Produced, engineered, edited and mastered by Adaq Khan

Distant Horizons is published by University of York Music Press – UYMP

Cover artwork created by Thomas Metcalf using Dolmen Nord #2 (2025) by Bastien Guillaume, with kind permission from the artist.

This recording was made possible with support from the Laurence Modiano Charitable Trust and the Vaughan Williams Foundation.

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS FOUNDATION

Photo credits:
Thomas Metcalf p. 8 John Cairns
David Palmer p. 9 Andrew Mason; digipack: Walter Vorjohann / Ensemble Modern
Robert Saxton p. 10 Katie Vandyck

Also available from Métier:

Robert Saxton: String Quartets 3 & 4; Sonata for Solo Violin "Reflections in Time"
Kreutzer Quartet; Peter Sheppard Skærved MEX 77138

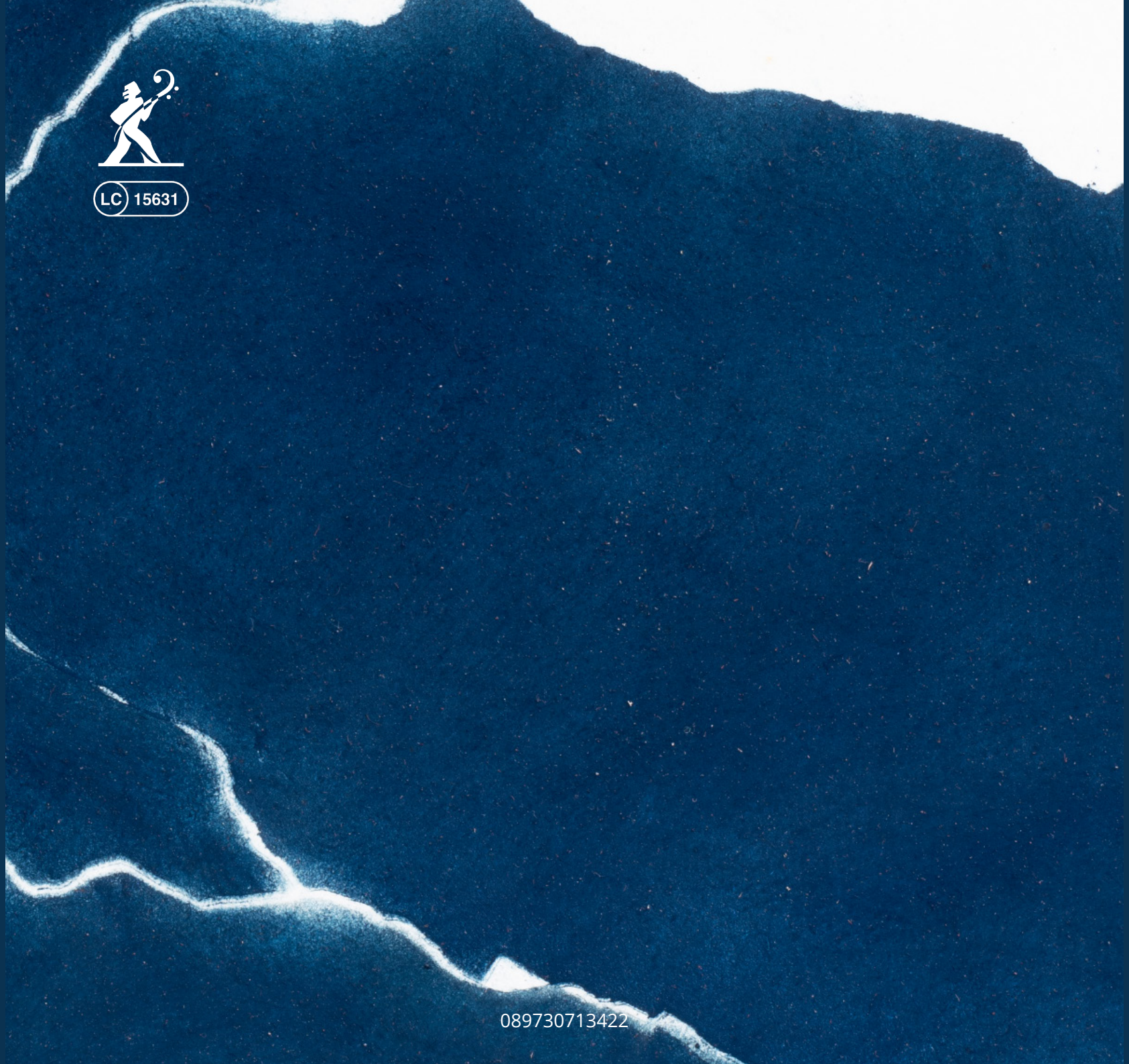
Robert Saxton: Portrait - Orchestral, chamber and vocal works
MSV 28624

Something So Transporting Bright:
Works by Gloria Coates, Joel Järventausta, Sadie Harrison, Thomas Metcalf
MEX 77132

All text, images and devices are copyright, all rights reserved
℗ & © 2026 Divine Art Ltd
metierrecords.com

6 FIRST INVERSION

WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1 Upper James Street, London, W1R 3HG.



089730713422