

signum
CLASSICS



LIFE

OLIVER DAVIS

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Julian Kershaw *conductor*



LIFE | OLIVER DAVIS (b. 1972)

Life for piano and strings

1	I	[3.15]
2	II	[2.21]
3	III	[3.25]

Huw Watkins *piano*

Biorhythms for violin and strings

4	I	[3.28]
5	II	[3.08]

Kerenza Peacock *violin*

6	<i>Veil for violin, strings and harp</i>	[4.01]
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Benjamin Baker *violin*

7	<i>Reflection for solo piano</i>	[2.14]
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Huw Watkins *piano*

Katherine Jenkinson *cello solo on tracks 5 and 6*
Benjamin Baker *additional violin on tracks 4 and 5*

Pieces of Wood for violin and strings

8	I	[2.41]
9	II	[2.38]
10	III	[2.48]

Kerenza Peacock *violin*

11	<i>Life Cycle for violin and strings</i>	[12.58]
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Benjamin Baker *violin*

12	<i>Mortal for violin, piano and strings</i>	[2.49]
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Kerenza Peacock *violin*
Huw Watkins *piano*

13	<i>Afterlife for solo piano</i>	[3.23]
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Huw Watkins *piano*

14	<i>Life Epilogue for piano and strings</i>	[1.32]
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Huw Watkins *piano*

Total timings:	[50.45]
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My initial inspiration for this album came from composing *Life Cycle* for violin and strings, with all the works that followed playing on the theme of life.

For the first movement of *Life* for solo piano and strings, I have played with alternating the time signature between 6/8 and a 3/4 waltz. The 6/8 sections are distinct in having a minor, slightly intense feel, as opposed to the more joyous 3/4 sections. The second movement was worked up from a short improvisation I wrote a few weeks prior to entering Air Studios to record this album. Its simplicity gives this movement an almost childlike quality. The last movement hints at the waltz feel of the first movement and sees the introduction of additional percussion instruments towards its climactic ending.

Biorhythms can be best defined as the cyclic pattern of emotional or physical activity that occurs throughout our lives. Both movements of this piece for solo violin and strings play on this idea through the use of cyclical patterns in the music. However, these aren't played by either the soloist or string orchestra that accompanies them; instead, I created two additional solo violin parts that play these cyclic patterns, and often echo each other. In the first movement, the solo

violin and orchestral parts dart in and out of the rhythms of these cyclic patterns. With the second movement, the solo violin and orchestral parts have a more sustained feel against the arpeggiated additional solo violin parts, joined here by a solo cello.

Veil is a new arrangement of a previously unrecorded movement from my score for the ballet *The Veil Between Worlds*, choreographed by Edwaard Liang for Pacific Northwest Ballet. Edwaard explores the theme of the worlds between life and death. In the live performance, this is depicted by the placement of a vast veil on stage. When I wrote the score, I used the structure of a violin concerto, with additional solo instruments appearing throughout. This particular movement features a cello solo.

Reflection for solo piano is a short piece I wrote which has a song-like form; its 'chorus' feels similar to a ballad in style. It is performed on this recording by Huw Watkins.

Pieces of Wood is inspired by the use of wood in string instruments – although a felled tree is no longer living, by being turned into an instrument, it has a new lease of life. I wrote the piece in three movements. The first movement is mainly

HUW WATKINS *piano*
KERENZA PEACOCK *violin* | BENJAMIN BAKER *violin*
ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA | JULIAN KERSHAW *conductor*

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scored for pizzicato strings. Before recording the orchestra, I recorded violinist Kerenza Peacock (for whom I wrote the piece) playing multiple lines that, combined, act as a rhythmic backdrop. We then recorded the orchestra on top of this. The second movement also has a pre-recorded part: a percussive beat made by Kerenza tapping her violin in different places. The next stage was to record the soloist and orchestra over this violin-tapping beat. The last movement has a slightly Celtic feel. As with the first movement, I wrote additional solo violin parts whose pizzicato patterns combine to create the 'rhythm section' which accompanies the more sustained solo violin and string orchestra parts.

Life Cycle was written for violinist Benjamin Baker and arranged for solo violin and strings. The piece is in five sections that segue from one to another. In the opening section, the main theme is established, returning later in the work. This section is followed by a slower passage which makes use of the orchestra trilling, over which the solo violin plays the melody in duet with a solo cello. This duet features in the spritely central section which has a playful feel. In contrast, the fourth section has more of a sense of intrigue and other-worldliness. To achieve this, I created a waltz that uses muted strings, often playing pizzicato,

which accompanies discordant sustained string passages. The final section sees the return of the main theme, but here it's played at a much faster pace, bringing the piece to a climactic end.

Mortal is written for solo violin, piano and strings, arranged so the instruments enter in that order. The piece opens with a solemn eleven-chord pattern for unaccompanied violin. The piano then enters and the piece then makes use of the first three chords followed by the seventh, eighth and ninth chords of the pattern. This is repeated when the strings enter, followed by variations on this pattern.

Afterlife is a work for solo piano which was inspired by an article I read about activity being detected in the brain after someone has died. Concluding the album is *Life Epilogue*, which has an early classical style keyboard part accompanied by a serene string arrangement with use of rubato in the piano part.

I dedicate this album to the memory of my father, the violinist Howard Davis. I'm sure it's no coincidence that I so often write for the violin. He was a big influence on me, and as those who knew him will agree, was absolutely full of life.

Oliver Davis

OLIVER DAVIS

Oliver Davis graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in 1994 and has since composed numerous concertos, ballet scores, albums, soundtracks and television scores working with many of the major London orchestras.

Davis' debut album *Flight*, recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra with soloist Kerenza Peacock, was released in March 2015 and quickly rose to number 2 in the UK Specialist Classical Charts with 5 star reviews in both the UK and US. In addition it was chosen as Featured Album of the Week on Classic FM and was broadcast daily on the station. After the release of *Flight* came Davis' second album *Seasons* in October 2015. This album featured his work *Anno*, a contemporary take on Vivaldi's *Quattro Stagioni*. This album also charted in the UK top 10 and was Album of the Week on Classic FM and in the Mail on Sunday. Following this release came *Dance*, recorded by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at Abbey Road studios and released in September 2016. This too became Classic FM's Album of the Week and featured in their 'Best of 2016' show. Various pieces from *Dance* and *Flight* were used to create the ballet *Dance Odyssey*, choreographed by Peter Walker and performed by New York City Ballet.



Davis' fourth album, *Liberty*, was released in February 2018. This reached number 1 in the iTunes Classical Charts and was also Classic FM's Album of the Week. Pieces from *Liberty* formed a new ballet *Bacchus*, choreographed by Matthew Neenan for Pacific Northwest Ballet and premiered in March 2019. Davis' next album, *Arcadia*, featured a piano piece of the same name, which on its release achieved over a million streams on Apple Music. The album reached number 1 in the iTunes Classical Charts, number 4 in the UK Classical Charts and 15 in the US

Billboard Charts. *Solace* was released in 2021. It was a lockdown album which saw performers record remotely all around the world. It entered the US Billboard Charts at no.12 and was both Classic FM's and Scala Radio's Album of the Week. Interviews on both BBC Radio 3 and Scala Radio followed, with the title piece being selected by Sidra Bell for her choreographic debut at New York City Ballet's Fall Fashion Gala 2021. The following year saw the release of the seventh album, *Air*. Its multi genre style included songs performed by Grace Davidson and Jeremy Budd, in addition to violin concertos performed by Kerenza Peacock and Benjamin Baker. Both violinists performed on the ballet *The Veil Between Worlds*, which was written for Edwaard Liang and Pacific Northwest Ballet. *Air* was Classic FM's Album of the Week and Scala Radio's Album of the Weekend. *Blue* was the eighth release and was written for Dutch piano duo Beth and Flo. It reached no.1 in the iTunes Chart and was Album of the Week on Classic FM.

In April 2023 Davis collaborated with Celine Gettins, Principal with Birmingham Royal Ballet, to create *Jubilate*, a new ballet celebrating the coronation of King Charles III. In 2024 Davis' music was used in over 100 ballet performances and on March 16th his music featured in five ballets across the US and UK.

HUW WATKINS

Huw Watkins is notable for his equal renown as a pianist and composer. Andrew Clark of the Financial Times describes him as "one of the most rounded composer-musicians in the UK." As a pianist, Watkins has performed with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, and the London Sinfonietta, as well as giving recitals at venues such as Wigmore Hall, the Smithsonian, and the Library of Congress. Watkins' ability to step into and enhance any musical endeavour is



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widely appreciated; The Telegraph described him aptly as an "unfailingly dependable and musical pianist who seems to be everywhere".

Watkins' chorus and orchestra work *The Moon* premiered at the 2019 Proms in London, and his *Dawning* was performed in early 2020 by the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. Watkins has written numerous chamber works, including string quartets for the Carducci and Calidore quartets, and a piano quintet for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Watkins has a large catalogue of vocal works including a pair of song cycles, *Remember* (2014) and *Echo* (2017), for soprano Ruby Hughes; the latter was co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall. He has recorded for several prominent classical music labels, often performing his own works; notably Mendelssohn's cello and piano works with his brother Paul Watkins (Chandos) and a disc dedicated to his work entitled *In my craft or sullen art* (NMC).

KERENZA PEACOCK

British violinist Kerenza Peacock studied with Howard Davis at the Royal Academy of Music, and has spent the last 10 years living in Los Angeles and London.

She has recorded on many films and TV shows including *Encanto*, *Ghostbusters*, *Downton Abbey* and the *Simpsons*. She is playing on a huge number of albums including by Barbra Streisand, Harry Styles and Madonna. She



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was Concertmaster of Adele's orchestra for her world tour and Vegas residency, played at the Oscars and led Billy Joel's orchestra at the 2024 Grammys. She turned down playing on the Beatles' final song however, because she had a gig with her bluegrass band.

A keen fiddle player, Kerenza toured with alt-bluegrass band The Coal Porters, and wrote two songs on their latest album. She led the Pavão String Quartet for 15 years of tours throughout the world, including to Syria, Israel and China. They recorded 5 albums which received 5 star reviews and extensive radio play. A album of quartets by Elgar and Bax was welcomed as "a real winner" from "an ensemble of real depth and musical distinction" (Classic FM Magazine), with an "intoxicating warmth and emotional spontaneity" (The Strad).

Kerenza composed a classical piece, *Rainbow*, for solo violin and orchestra which received a standing ovation at its debut in St Martin-in-the-Fields. Her piece for string quartet, *The Whispering Tree* has been performed many times in California and England.

Highlights of her career so far have included performing on over 20 different Stradivari instruments and once, during an encore, tap-dancing down the aisle of St. Martin in the Fields. Kerenza recently gathered 94 violinists from 29 countries to play in harmony with Ukrainian violinists in their bomb shelters. The video went viral, being played on the news in dozens of countries and raising much money for humanitarian aid.

BENJAMIN BAKER

Since winning 1st Prize at the 2016 Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York and 3rd Prize at the Michael Hill Competition in New Zealand Benjamin has established a strong international presence.

Described by the New York Times as bringing '*virtuosity, refinement and youthful exuberance*' to his New York debut at Merkin Concert Hall he is much sought after as soloist and chamber musician.

Recent highlights include regular appearances at Wigmore Hall and on BBC Radio 3, his debuts with the Fort Worth, Mobile, Columbus, Charleston and Newport Symphony Orchestras in the USA, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, London



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Philharmonic Orchestra, and Scottish Chamber Orchestra at the East Neuk Festival in the UK, and Auckland Philharmonia, Christchurch Symphony, and Orchestra Wellington in New Zealand.

In 2021 Benjamin launched At the World's Edge Festival (AWE) in Queenstown, NZ - an annual spring chamber music festival taking place every October attracting artists and audiences from around the world. From its hugely successful launch and growing support, in 2023 AWE launched a series of events sharing a piece of

New Zealand music and culture with audiences and musicians overseas which has led to a growing annual tour of performances in New York, Chicago and London.

Following a hugely successful launch in 2021, solo recordings include collaborations with the BBC Concert and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras and two critically acclaimed albums with pianist Daniel Lebhardt for Delphian, 1942 and 1919:Coda.

Born in New Zealand, Benjamin studied with Natasha Boyarsky at the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Royal College of Music where he was awarded the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Rose Bowl. In 2013 he won 1st Prize at the Windsor International Competition and was a prize-winner at the YCAT International Auditions in London.

Benjamin plays on a Giovanni Grancino from 1694 on generous loan from a Charitable Trust.

KATHERINE JENKINSON

Praised by the Independent newspaper for her *“technical security backed up by rare musical sensitivity”* Katherine Jenkinson (cello) is respected as one of the UK’s leading cellists specialising in solo and chamber music. She has performed as recitalist and concerto soloist throughout Europe, in Africa, USA and Asia and has even enjoyed performing Dvorak’s Cello Concerto outdoors in the sweltering heat of the Seychelles.

In 2017, Katherine had the privilege of recording a new cello concerto with The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra which was written for her by Oliver Davis. This was released in February 2018 and the album hit no.1 in the classical charts. Katherine performed and worked closely on ‘Fratres’ for cello and piano with Avro Part himself. Last year (2023) Katherine recorded the ABRSM cello syllabus for the board. She is soon to release a new chamber version of the Elgar Cello Concerto with string quintet and solo cello. Katherine is performing this around the UK over 2024.

She was a founder member of The Rautio Piano Trio, and was a member of The Allegri String Quartet 2008-2011. In 2008 she joined Ruth Rogers and Martin Cousin to form The Aquinas



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Piano Trio. Their seven albums together have been received well. Described by Gramophone as *‘spot-on in interpretative instinct’* the Aquinas Piano Trio has established itself over the last five years as one of Britain’s most sought after chamber groups.

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra’s (RPO) mission to enrich lives through orchestral experiences that are uncompromising in their excellence and inclusive in their appeal, places it at the forefront of music-making in the UK and internationally. Typically performing approximately 200 concerts a year and with a worldwide live and online audience of more than 60 million people, the Orchestra is proud to embrace a broad repertoire and reach a diverse audience. Whilst artistic integrity remains paramount, the RPO is unafraid to push boundaries and is equally at home recording video game, film and television soundtracks and working with pop stars, as it is touring the world performing the great symphonic repertoire.

Throughout its history, the RPO has attracted and collaborated with the most inspiring artists

and in August 2021, the Orchestra was thrilled to welcome Vasily Petrenko as its new Music Director. A landmark appointment in the RPO’s history, Vasily’s first three seasons with the RPO have been lauded by audiences and critics alike.

As well as a busy schedule of international performances, the Orchestra enjoys an annual season of concerts in London’s Royal Albert Hall (where the RPO is Associate Orchestra), the Southbank Centre’s Royal Festival Hall and Cadogan Hall, where it is celebrating its 20th Season as Resident Orchestra. The RPO tours extensively around the UK and this fits with its mission to place orchestral music at the heart of contemporary society. Through collaboration with creative partners, the RPO fosters deeper engagement with communities to ensure that live orchestral music is accessible to as inclusive and diverse an audience as possible. To help achieve this goal, in 1993 the Orchestra launched RPO



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Jonathan Ayling
Chantal Webster
Roberto Sorrentino
Jean-Baptiste Toselli

DOUBLE BASSES

Benjamin Cunningham
David Gordon

HARP

Suzy Willison-Kawalec

JULIAN KERSHAW

Julian Kershaw won a scholarship at the age of 13 to study at the Royal College of Music where he graduated with honours, studying Bassoon, Piano, Composition (with Oliver Knussen) and Conducting. After playing as a professional bassoonist for a few years he went on to pursue a career in writing music.

Julian is now an experienced arranger, orchestrator, composer and conductor working in film, TV, albums and live music. His many film orchestral and arrangement credits include *Notting Hill*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods*, *The Little Mermaid* and recently *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*.

His TV credits for arrangements and orchestration include *Blue Planet*, *Planet Earth*, *Life*, and *Frozen Planet*.

Julian's versatility has also led him to work as an arranger for many leading artists including Sir Paul McCartney, Richard Ashcroft, Elvis Costello, Kasabian, Nigel Kennedy, Vanessa-Mae, Lesley Garrett and Kasabian.



© David Jones

Perhaps most notably, Julian did the arrangement of “She” featured on the film *Notting Hill*, sung by Elvis Costello.

As a conductor he has worked with many of London's leading orchestras and has conducted dozens of film scores. He has toured as conductor with Nigel Kennedy, conducted the first ever BBC Electric Prom with Kasabian and appears as the circus conductor in Tim Burton's film *Dumbo*.



All tracks composed, orchestrated, produced and mixed by Oliver Davis.
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Kerenza Peacock – additional violin tracks recorded on location at Powderham Castle on 24th July 2024
 Benjamin Baker – additional violin tracks recorded on location at All Saints Odiham on 17th June 2024

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