



**Rob
KEELEY**
(b. 1960)

Chamber Music
Distil
**Sonata for Clarinet
and Piano**
Piano Trio No. 2

Victoria Samek, Clarinet
Rob Keeley, Piano
Chris Brannick, Vibraphone
Aquinas Trio



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Clarinet Quartet (2017)		15:48	14	Lento	2:02
1	Andante con moto	3:08	15	Allegro vivace	4:53
2	Sorbetto I	1:04			
3	Andante	2:05	16	Distil (2016)	5:25
4	Scherzo (Presto)	2:48		Five Bagatelles (2017)	7:23
5	Sorbetto II (after Mozart)	0:50	17	Andante con moto	1:21
6	Theme and Variations	5:46	18	Fresh and bright	1:22
Six Duos for Two Violins (2015)		11:52	19	Andante misterioso	1:25
7	Allegretto	1:29	20	Allegro	1:17
8	Allegretto	2:00	21	Nonchalantly	1:50
9	Allegretto con moto	1:41		Piano Trio No. 2 (2015)	16:00
10	Con moto	1:57	22	Allegretto	4:04
11	Scherzo: Presto, volando	2:18	23	Song: Andante con moto	6:09
12	Allegretto	2:19	24	Alla Mazurka	5:41
Sonata for Clarinet and Piano		12:13			
	(2016)				
13	Allegro moderato	5:12			

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Victoria Samek **1–6**, **13–15**, **17–21**,
Sarah Thurlow **1–6**, Chris Hatton **1–6**, Andrew Sparling **1–6**, Clarinet
Caroline Balding **7–12**, Ruth Ehrlich **7–12**, Violin
Rob Keeley, Piano **13–21** • Chris Brannick, Vibraphone **16**
Aquinas Trio **22–24**
Ruth Rogers, Violin • Katherine Jenkinson, Cello • Martin Cousin, Piano

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As the mainly recent pieces on this album show, I am very attracted to writing for small groups, and these days, even more for 'classical' media rather than the mixed ensemble so common in much contemporary music. As the generally abstract titles of my pieces suggest, I prefer to let the notes do most of the talking – I still believe (maybe hope...) that music (mine, at least) – if it's any good, does not need much verbal elucidation for it to make sense to a curious listener. I write music that will be heard, ideally, alongside the standard repertoire, and it is composed very much against classical 'backgrounds', so for instance, in my *Piano Trio No. 2*, Haydn is the model in the sprightly, lightly-scored first movement, Chopin's *Mazurkas* in the finale. The central slow movement, punctuated by 'scherzando' outbursts is less obviously indebted.

The *Clarinet Quartet* is a good example of my interest in exploring slightly unusual forces: although it's an ensemble Mozart would have recognised (albeit with basset horns replacing clarinets) it doesn't have a huge repertoire, at least on this scale. Four quite substantial movements are interleaved with two tiny 'sorbeti', or 'palate-cleansers', the second of which is actually based on a quirky little fugal exposition by Mozart himself. The wonderful blend and agility afforded by the medium is

exploited to the full, especially in the *Theme and Variations* which concludes the work.

More clarinet music, this time with piano, with my *Sonata* and *Five Bagatelles*: perhaps the most rewarding musical collaboration in the past few years has been that which I enjoy with Victoria Samek – she is a constant source of inspiration, and her dedication and musical understanding have given birth to more than ten works for clarinets and saxophones in various groupings. The *Sonata* is a 'real' sonata, with a rather Brahmsian first movement, a delicate wisp of a slow interlude, and a vivacious *rondo* finale: it's designed to give pleasure to both performers and listeners, as are the *Five Bagatelles*: tender morsels which I hope leave you wanting more.

A similar intention is present in the *Six Duos for Two Violins*: in an earlier *Diptych* (2013) I felt hadn't completely exhausted all I wanted to explore for this medium, with the intertwining counterpoint of the Bach *Double Concerto* as the main inspiration: I love writing in two parts. The one 'classical' medium I'm not especially attracted to is the standard string quartet – perhaps I'm creatively inhibited by the already vast and peerless repertoire.

The title for the album, 'Distil' is the name of the work positioned at the calm centre of the album: as still as I dare, contemplative, and totally focussed on sound rather than any

more 'traditional' narrative of contrasts. The vibraphone and piano are treated almost as a single, blended instrument. Chris Brannick, its dedicatee, has been another friendly collaborator for many years, and he says the following about the piece:

'When I first rehearsed this piece, I immediately fell in love with its contrasts of textures and sonorities. The use of the pedal on both vibraphone and piano opened up a rich balance of the sustained and non-sustained sounds.

The slowly evolving harmonic world flowed effortlessly yet inexorably towards an unsettled irresolution, while that one moment of rhythmic unison shortly before the end felt both strangely grounded and satisfying. There's a real pleasure from working on a piece that offers the players such high rewards from attention to the details where every note and every rhythm matters.'

Rob Keeley

Rob Keeley



Photo: Martin Keeley

Rob Keeley studied at the Royal College of Music (RCM) with Oliver Knussen and at Magdalen College Oxford. In 1988 he studied with Franco Donatoni at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, and at the Tanglewood Music Centre, where he worked with Oliver Knussen and Hans Werner Henze, and received strong encouragement from Leonard Bernstein. Active as a freelance pianist, Keeley has given first performances of many works written for him, including those of Harrison Birtwistle, Michael Finnissy, Gary Carpenter and Richard Emsley. Between 1993 and 2018 Keeley was a lecturer in composition at King's College London. His music is published mainly by Composers Edition, as well as Samek Music, Chester Music and Novello, and Resonata Music (brass) and Tetractys. Albums of his works have appeared on the NMC Recordings, Lorelt, Samek Music and Divine Art labels, and an album of his orchestral music is in preparation with Toccata Classics.

Victoria Samek



Photo: Simon Weir

Victoria Samek is one of the most exciting and versatile clarinetists playing in the UK today. Combining breath-taking technique and musical integrity in her performances and recordings, she is driven by her commitment to musical excellence. A long-standing commitment to contemporary music has resulted in over 50 commissions and dedications, including many works by Rob Keeley, and a bass clarinet concerto by Thea Musgrave, which was given its world premiere with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Samek is founder of the international recording and publishing company Clarinet and Saxophone Classics: 2017 marked its 25th anniversary and saw the launch of Samek Music. Samek studied for a Masters in Performance Science, and this, coupled with her unique perspective as performer, has resulted in a ground-breaking course and publication for practice

and performance: *Organise–Prioritise–Commit; The Definitive Practice to Perform Method* will be launched in 2019. Victoria Samek is a D'Addario Performing Artist and an endorsee for Selmer (Paris).

Caroline Balding

Caroline Balding has given recitals throughout the world at such venues as La Fenice in Venice, Wigmore Hall, London, and the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, and gave the Taiwanese premiere of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. Often appearing on BBC Radio 3 and numerous other European radio stations, she also participated in the series *Women in Music* for Channel 4, and in a series about Beethoven for the BBC (dressed as a man). Her extensive discography ranges from 17th-century Italian violin sonatas to numerous works by contemporary composers. She has had the privilege of taking part in a great many premiere performances and of working with foremost contemporary composers such as George Benjamin, Harrison Birtwistle, Michael Finnissy, Brian Ferneyhough, Nicola LeFanu and Judith Weir among others.

Ruth Ehrlich

Ruth Ehrlich made her debut as a soloist at the Royal Festival Hall playing Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* with the National Youth Orchestra. After reading music at King's College, Cambridge, she joined the Fairfield Quartet as first violinist. While based in New York, she played in the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and with pianist Marcia Eckert made her New York recital debut at the Weill Recital Hall, and recorded the complete violin and piano works of Germaine Tailleferre. Since returning to London Ehrlich has developed a performing and recording career specialising in 20th- and 21st-century music, with the Britten Sinfonia and the Lontano, Gemini and Apartment House ensembles among others. As a member of the Britten Sinfonia she has been involved in collaborations with a wide range of artists including Brad Mehldau, Max Richter, Thomas Adès and Nico Muhly.

Sarah Thurlow

Sarah Thurlow studied at the Royal College of Music with Robert Hill, Michael Harris and Andrew Marriner. An English Speaking Union Music Scholarship enabled her to continue her studies with Theodore Oien in Aspen and Detroit, and the RCM's Mills Williams Junior Fellowship enabled her to study with Hans Deinzer in Italy. She has performed as a soloist at the Purcell Room, the Queen Elizabeth Hall, St John's Smith Square, and the Bridgewater Hall. She plays regularly with the London Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and is a member of the London Concert Orchestra and the Glyndebourne Tour Orchestra.

Chris Hatton

Chris Hatton is a freelance woodwind specialist based in London. He enjoys a varied career consisting of orchestral, chamber and theatre work. A graduate of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, Hatton has won many awards for his performances including the Harold Clarke Woodwind Competition, the Wilfred Hambleton Clarinet Competition and the Ivan Sutton Award. Aside from orchestral playing, Hatton frequently finds himself 'tripling' (performing on clarinet, saxophone and flute) in theatre and opera. Recent work has included various West End shows, as well as regional and touring productions across the UK and Europe.

Andrew Sparling

Andrew Sparling is a member of the ensemble Lontano, who have recently recorded two chamber operas by Ethel Smyth. He was a member of ensembles Apartment House, Ensemble Exposé and Double Image, and played in the London Sinfonietta at Carnegie Hall and the opening of the Tate Modern. As a recitalist he has performed in venues from Jersey to Vietnam; his recording credits include solo albums for NMC Recordings and Lorelt. For 14 years he was a member of the clarinet quartet No Strings Attached which toured for the British Council in Sri Lanka, Jordan, Egypt and Indonesia. He plays Classical and Baroque period instruments, as guest-principal of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment at Glyndebourne and Covent Garden, and on the BBC TV series *The Genius of Mozart* in which he also acted the role of Mozart's friend and fellow freemason, clarinettist Anton Stadler.

Chris Brannick

Percussionist, singer, actor and writer, with degrees in maths and music, Chris Brannick is best known as a percussion soloist, and is also a member of internationally renowned contemporary iconoclasts ensemble bash and Classic Rhythm. Brannick has appeared in a wide variety of acting roles. His book *World Beats* is published by A&C Black, he won the 2018 Global Motion Pictures Award for both Best Screenplay and Best Character Development and his plays regularly appear at the Brighton and Edinburgh fringes.

Aquinas Piano Trio
Ruth Rogers, Katherine Jenkinson, Martin Cousin



Critically acclaimed by *Gramophone* magazine, the Aquinas Piano Trio has established itself over the last five years as one of Britain's most sought-after chamber groups. They were also praised by *Musical Opinion* following their Wigmore Hall debut in December 2015. Their growing list of recordings includes the Saint-Saëns *Trios*, released on Guild in 2015, and their album of Mendelssohn *Trios* was a recommended recording in *The Strad* magazine in May 2015. The group has performed at major London venues such as Wigmore Hall and Kings Place, at many popular festivals including Brighton and Chipping Campden, and further afield in Mallorca and Belgium.

Rob Keeley considers chamber music to be the most direct and expressive medium for him as a composer. The spirits of Haydn and Chopin can be heard in the *Second Piano Trio*, and there is a wink towards Mozart in the wonderful blend and agility to be found in the *Clarinet Quartet*. All of these works are the result of musical friendships, the faith and commitment of the players an integral part of each performance, with the remarkable sonorities of *Distil* as its still centre.

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			22–24	Piano Trio No. 2 (2015)	16:00
13–15	Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (2016)	12:13			

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Rob Keeley, Piano 13–21 • Chris Brannick, Vibraphone 16
Aquinas Trio 22–24**

A detailed track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet

Recorded: 22–23 September 2017 **1–6, 13–15, 17–24**, 28 January 2017 **7–12** and 8 October 2016 **16**
at All Saints Church, East Finchley, UK **1–6, 13–24** and St Thomas' Church, Stockport, UK **7–12**
Producers, engineers and editors: Jim Unwin **1–6, 13–15, 17–24**, Simon Weir **16** and Richard Scott **7–12**
Assistant: Dave Collins **13–15, 17–21** • Booklet notes: Rob Keeley
Publishers: Samek Music **1–6, 13–15, 17–21**, Composer's edition **7–12, 16, 22–24**
Cover photograph by Martin Keeley