

SOMM
RECORDINGS



DAVID MATTHEWS

Anna: Symphonic Diptych
Symphony No.11
Flute Concerto

EMMA HALNAN flute
ULSTER ORCHESTRA
JAC VAN STEEN

Anna: Symphonic Diptych, Op.171

My opera *Anna* had its concert premiere at The Grange Hampshire in July 2023, conducted by Jac van Steen. Shortly afterwards, Jac suggested that I should make an orchestral reduction, as Strauss had done for his *Intermezzo* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. So in this Symphonic Diptych I have compressed the opera into two movements, one for each act, which attempt to tell the story in purely orchestral terms: all the vocal parts included have been transferred to instruments. In doing so I have slightly increased the opera's orchestra, using four horns instead of two, adding two trombones, and replacing the piano part with harp. The movements may be played together or separately.

The opera is about a brother (Peter) and sister (Anna) and their different reactions to the revolution that has just taken place in their country – perceptibly based on the 1989 revolutions in Central Europe. Roger Scruton's libretto is both a story of love culminating in death, and of forgiveness. Peter and Anna have lost both their parents: their father was arrested for helping dissidents to escape and died in prison. Anna falls in love with a young man, Miro, who went to live in America but has come back to his home town. At Peter's insistence Anna asks Miro to explain how he was able to escape. He eventually confesses that as a teenager he was forced by the secret police to work with them. They both then realise that it was Miro's information about Anna's father that led to the latter's arrest and subsequent death. Anna, after the initial terrible shock, finds it in herself to forgive Miro. Peter cannot; he discovers his father's gun and confronts Miro, but then turns the weapon on himself. Anna tries to get it away from him; when it goes off in the struggle, she is killed. The tragedy of her death unites the two men, and the chorus joins them in a prayer for forgiveness.

The beginning of the first movement ("Anna in Love") is dominated by Peter's gloomy feelings about the revolution and how it will probably not bring about the things that he and his father aspired to. His mood is interrupted by Anna and her friend Marta, who are

more optimistic, and they dance a tango. Anna is grateful to her brother for bringing her up after their parents died, and she sings a tender aria about her childhood (oboe, then clarinet) together with a violin theme that conveys her innocence.

Into the bookshop where she works comes Miro (solo trumpet). He immediately sees Anna and is struck by her, as she is by him. They introduce themselves and there is an immediate rapport, and when they sing a simple duet (flute and cor anglais), we know they are bound to fall in love. That their love is eventually doomed is not at all obvious from the final section of the movement, which, using a new theme that now depicts Anna as a mature woman, is a love duet ending in ecstatic consummation.

The opening of the second movement ("Lament for Anna") immediately anticipates the tragedy that will eventually occur, with the mature Anna's theme presented in a solemn G minor. We move on to Anna's aria (solo oboe) which expresses the tumult of her feelings but ends in her forgiveness of Miro. Finally come Anna's death and Peter's and Miro's acts of forgiveness (solo cello and viola), followed by the whole ensemble, who in the opera take up the lines "She paid the price of our bitterness. For love of her, we must forgive." The ending is a quiet D major.

Symphony No.11, Op.168

My Eleventh is my sixth attempt to write a single-movement symphony. My first three symphonies were consciously influenced by Schoenberg's First String Quartet – where the four classical movements are joined together – and also by the more integrated single-movement form of Sibelius's Seventh Symphony. My own Seventh Symphony's shape was much affected by Sibelius's, and my Eleventh follows on from my Seventh, though its variation form harks back to my First Symphony.

Composition began after the 2022 Presteigne Festival, where, at an orchestral concert, I heard some striking trumpet-playing. The next day I wrote a few bars of quiet trumpet solo over a string chord. I did not know what to do with this idea until, at the end of the year, I thought it might be the opening of a symphony. But I soon decided to preface it with an allegro D major/minor theme, beginning on violas and moving to first violins. These two ideas form the basis for a set of free variations, which include two scherzos, a slow section and a chaconne that recurs several times. There is also a brief recapitulation of the opening and, finally, a slow coda, which ends with a *pianissimo* D major chord.

While I was writing the Symphony I reread *The Lord of the Rings*, which is probably my favourite book. I have included a brief passage that attempts to evoke Tolkien's description of the woods in Lórien; there are three horn calls inspired by the horn of Rohan; and the chaconne twice rises to a climax that perhaps refers to a battle, as in my orchestral piece *Chaconne*, which the BBC Philharmonic played during my time composing this symphony.

The Eleventh Symphony is dedicated to Robbie Lamming, a dear friend and fellow admirer of Tolkien's great work.

Flute Concerto, Op.166

The flute is essentially a melodic instrument, and my Concerto alternates between song and dance. I decided on a fairly small orchestra, with two oboes, two bassoons, two horns and strings – the orchestra of most of Haydn's earlier symphonies – to which I added a harp, the flute's natural companion, and an optional tambourine in the second of the three movements.

Before I started writing, I listened to Nielsen's Concerto – I think, the best of all flute concertos – and was interested in Robert Simpson's comment that its first movement

“spends all its time looking for a key”, which is what I decided to do in my own first movement. It begins in E flat major, and then there is an ascending series of tonalities – F, G, A, B flat, C, D – before a return to E flat for a brief recapitulation, a cadenza, and a coda that returns to the search for keys and finally ends in D major. The music combines a gentle allegretto with a fast waltz.

The slow middle movement is in D flat major, with an allegretto middle section in 6/8 and 9/8, which I thought of as a dance to celebrate Pan with panpipes and which is mostly pentatonic. The main tonality is much more stable throughout. The finale begins with a little tune I wrote for my wife, Jenifer, at Christmas 2019, which has something of an Irish flavour. It is in G major, but the flute immediately wants to change it to E flat, and the movement stays in E flat for most of its duration. The opening section alternates with another energetic dance in compound time, and the Concerto ends with the first tune, now in 6/8, the flute on its high E flat.

David Matthews



“Few other living composers can deploy the classical virtues of clarity, tradition and restraint to such cogent ends”

Tempo

One of the leading symphonists of our time, **David Matthews** is preoccupied with working in the great inherited forms of the past and the task of finding new ways to renew them. The natural world provides him with a constant source of inspiration.

His singular body of work, spanning almost 60 years, has established an international reputation for David Matthews as one of the leading symphonists of our time. Born in London in 1943, he began composing at

the age of 16. He read Classics at the University of Nottingham – where he has more recently been made an Honorary Doctor of Music – and afterwards studied composition privately with Anthony Milner. He was also helped by the advice and encouragement of Nicholas Maw and spent three years as an assistant to Benjamin Britten in the late 1960s. In the 1970s a friendship with the Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe (leading to collaboration and numerous trips to Sydney) helped Matthews find his own distinctive voice.

Matthews's music unashamedly embraces his own brand of tonality and he retains a firm commitment to a music that is grounded in song and dance and is connected to the vernacular. He has been the recipient of numerous BBC Proms commissions, including

Cantiga, his dramatic 1988 scena for soprano and orchestra, and the *Concerto in Azzurro* for cellist Steven Isserlis, which was nominated for a 2003 BBC Radio 3 Listeners' Award. Matthews has written prodigiously for string quartet and in his vocal music has set poets from E.E. Cummings and Rilke to Housman and D.H. Lawrence, Hill, Eliot and Auden to Sappho (in the original Greek). Choral music is equally important. Matthews composed his most ambitious work to date, *Vespers* for soloists, chorus and orchestra, for the Huddersfield Choral Society in 1994, and his 2014 anthem *To what God shall we chant our songs of battle?* was broadcast live on BBC Television as part of a vigil at Westminster Abbey commemorating the outbreak of the First World War.

Matthews's music has been recorded extensively, with his symphonic output attracting particularly appreciative reviews: "one of our leading composers" wrote Calum MacDonald in *BBC Music Magazine*; "a leading 21st-century exponent of the form" wrote Arnold Whittall in *Gramophone*. In 2011, the Dutton recording of his Second and Sixth Symphonies with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales was awarded a prestigious BBC Music Magazine Award.

Matthews's 80th birthday in 2023 saw the composer celebrated by the BBC Philharmonic and Ulster orchestras, the Deal, Little Missenden and Presteigne festivals, and the creation of a new film about the composer by Barrie Gavin, *A Composer's Landscape*. Recent works include the 2019 Concerto for Orchestra, his Symphony No.10 (premiered by the BBC Philharmonic and Jac van Steen), and his first opera, *Anna*, with a libretto by Roger Scruton, presented at the 2023 Grange Festival. He has also added to his prodigious body of chamber music with an Oboe Sonata (for Nicholas Daniel), his 16th and 17th String Quartets (for long-standing collaborators the Kretuzer Quartet, who are engaged in a multi-volume recording project of Matthews's complete quartets) and the *Kingsdown Suite* for solo guitar, commissioned by the Julian Bream Trust and premiered at Wigmore Hall in 2023 by Pavel Ravev. 2024 saw the premiere performances of the three works on this album.



Jac van Steen was born in the Netherlands and studied orchestral and choral conducting at the Brabant Conservatory of Music.

Since participating in the BBC Conductors Seminar in 1985 he has enjoyed a very busy career conducting Europe's finest orchestras, as well as the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (Kuala Lumpur) and the New Japan Philharmonic (Tokyo). In May 2025 he made his South American debut with the São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra (OSESP) in Brazil.

He has held posts as Music Director and Chief Conductor with the Dutch National Ballet, the

orchestras of Bochum and Nuremberg, the Staatskapelle Weimar, the Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra of Dortmund, and Musikkollegium Winterthur, as well as Principal Guest Conductor posts with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the Prague Symphony Orchestra. At present, he is Honorary Principal Guest Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra.

Jac van Steen built up a substantial opera repertoire during his long directorships of the German opera houses of Weimar (2002–2005) and Dortmund (2008–2013), after which came debuts with both Opera North and the Vienna Volksoper in 2013, followed by a very successful debut at the Garsington Opera. He returned to Opera North for several more productions, developed an annual association with the Vienna Volksoper and has made biennial appearances with Garsington Opera including for R. Strauss's *Intermezzo* (2015), Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (2017) and Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* (2019 & 2023). He also

led the Jette Parker Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in the 2018 Summer Performance. The 2018/19 season saw his debut with the Oslo Opera in two Puccini productions. His debut with the Dutch Touring Opera came in the 2023/24 season with a highly acclaimed production of Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane*, the success of which led to an invitation to return the following season for R. Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

Alongside his work as a conductor, Jac van Steen serves as Professor of Conducting at the Royal Conservatory of Music in The Hague, working with a select group of students from all over the world who take part in the National Masters Programme. He has also worked with the Royal Northern College of Music and Chetham's School of Music in Manchester and gives regular master classes and concerts at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music in London, as well as at Cambridge University.

Since winning the woodwind category of the BBC Young Musician competition in 2010, flautist **Emma Halnan** has been in high demand for her solo and collaborative performances in the UK and internationally.

As a concerto soloist, Emma has performed with orchestras such as the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, London Mozart Players, European Union Chamber Orchestra and Welsh Sinfonia. She has performed live on BBC television and radio, including on Radio 3's *In Tune* on multiple occasions.



Photo: © Kiran Acharya

In recital, Emma has performed at venues and festivals including St Martin-in-the-Fields, St John's Smith Square, Hertfordshire Festival of Music, Lake District Summer Music Festival, St David's Hall and KonzertGut Lucklum (Germany).

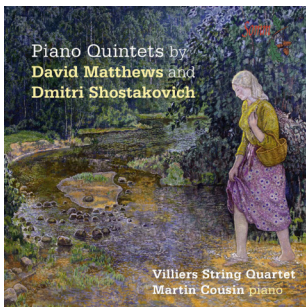
Emma enjoys commissioning new works; composers who have written for her include Sir Karl Jenkins, David Matthews, James Francis Brown, Martin Bussey and Robert Peate.

A highly reputed flute teacher, Emma teaches at Wells Cathedral School and Cambridge University. She has given master classes at the Royal Academy of Music and Trinity Laban and has taught on courses including the international Oxford Flute Summer School.

Emma studied at the Royal Academy of Music with William Bennett, Kate Hill, Patricia Morris and Lisa Beznosiuk, and previously with Anna Pope at the Purcell School of Music. She later studied privately with Robert Winn. She was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM) in the Academy's 2024 Honours; this is awarded to alumni of the Academy who have distinguished themselves in the music profession.

Emma holds both British and Irish passports.

More from David Matthews and the Ulster Orchestra under Jac van Steen
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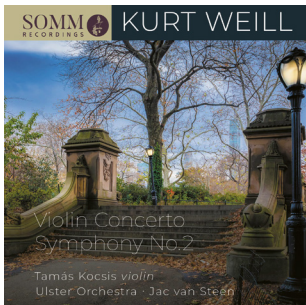
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FIRST RECORDINGS

DAVID MATTHEWS

EMMA HALNAN flute
ULSTER ORCHESTRA
JAC VAN STEEN conductor

Anna: Symphonic Diptych, Op.171 [32:51]

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|---|---------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Anna in Love | 19:47 |
| 2 | II. Lament for Anna | 13:02 |

3 **Symphony No.11, Op.168** 19:50

Flute Concerto, Op.166 [23:07]

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|---|-----------------------|------|
| 4 | I. Allegretto | 8:38 |
| 5 | II. Lento | 8:18 |
| 6 | III. Allegro risoluto | 6:07 |

Total duration: **75:52**

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