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Strange Loops

Clarinet Quintets

by Anna Clyne, Ruth Gipps
and Carl Maria von Weber



Mark van de Wiel *clarinet*
with Soloists of the Philharmonia

Strange Loops

Clarinet Quintets by Anna Clyne, Ruth Gipps and Carl Maria von Weber

1	Strange Loops*	Anna Clyne (1980 -)	[19.40]
2	Rhapsody for Clarinet & String Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 23	Ruth Gipps (1921-1999)	[10.10]
	Clarinet Quintet in B-Flat Major, Op.34, J. 182	Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826)	
3	I. Allegro		[10.28]
4	II. Fantasia - Adagio ma non troppo		[05.58]
5	III. Minuetto Capriccio - Presto		[05.16]
6	IV. Rondo - Allegro gioioso		[06.14]
	Total timings		57.49

*World Premiere Recording

MARK VAN DE WIEL, clarinet
ZSOLT-TIHAMÉR VISONTAY, **FIONA CORNALL**, violins
NICHOLAS BOOTIMAN, viola
KAREN STEPHENSON, cello

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Anna Clyne's acrobatic and spellbinding clarinet quintet *Strange Loops* gives this album its title. My Philharmonia colleagues and I gave the UK premiere of this enchanting piece, a Philharmonia co-commission, in the Music of Today series, and this is its first recording. One could imagine that the virtuoso loops of the Weber Quintet clarinet part might indeed have seemed strange and wondrous in 1815! It seems an excellent companion for the Clyne with its wide-ranging exuberance and lyricism. The Gipps Rhapsody is included simply because it's so gorgeous, and deserves to be heard more.

We very much enjoyed our recording sessions in the Lady Stringer Studio at the impressive new Garsington Studios on the Wormsley Estate, the first commercial recording made there. Many thanks to Garsington Opera and to the Philharmonia for their help, also to Anna Clyne for her advice on *Strange Loops* and to Oliver Janes for his advice on the Gipps edition and for providing the programme note.

Mark van de Wiel

Anna Clyne *Strange Loops*

I Am a Strange Loop is a book by Douglas Hofstadter, examining in depth the concept of a strange loop to explain the sense of “I”. The concept of a strange loop was originally developed in his book *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. He writes:

*“In the end, we are self-perceiving, self-inventing,
locked-in mirages that are little miracles of self-reference.”*

In *Strange Loops* I explore musical loops - motifs and gestures that repeat, morph, modulate and recapitulate in various guises. At the heart of this piece is a sense of playfulness and yearning - inspired by the creative process in isolation. I composed *Strange Loops* during the lockdown during COVID in 2020.

© Anna Clyne

Ruth Gipps *Rhapsody Op.23*

Ruth Gipps (1921–1999) was a remarkable British composer, conductor and oboist whose music combines effortless lyricism with muscular, confident craftsmanship. Written in the early part of her career and dedicated to her husband, clarinetist Robert Baker, the Rhapsody Quintet reflects Gipps’ gift for long melody and her instinctive understanding of instrumental colour.

Composed in a single, continuous movement, the work unfolds freely rather than following a strict formal design, true to its rhapsodic title. Sweeping, song-like themes are passed between the instruments, often set against rich, warmly textured accompaniments. Moments of calm give way to more urgent, rhythmically driven passages, creating a sense of ebb and flow. Folk-like melodies become infectious before subsiding and ultimately leaving the clarinet alone with a memory of pastoral song.

Throughout the piece, Gipps balances expressive lyricism with flashes of dramatic intensity, allowing each instrument space to shine while maintaining a strong sense of ensemble dialogue.

The Rhapsody Quintet is a fantastic example of Gipps’ distinctive voice: romantic in spirit, bold in character,

and deeply communicative. It stands as a reminder of her significant contribution to twentieth-century British chamber music and her ability to write music that speaks directly to performers and audiences alike.

© Oliver Janes

Weber *Clarinet Quintet*

The first three great clarinet quintets, by Mozart, Weber, and Brahms (of course still occupying the medal positions as I write), were each inspired by the playing of a great and individual clarinet soloist, in Weber’s case the great virtuoso Heinrich Baermann. His flexible approach to tone production, along with his hugely accomplished technique, and recent developments in the design of the clarinet, enabled Weber to stretch virtuoso clarinet writing and extremes of expression. His ten-keyed Griesling and Schlott clarinet made Weber’s rapid chromatic writing feasible. Playing this quintet on our modern 17 keyed instruments still holds its challenges, though! As far as the quartet is concerned, while Weber showcases the clarinet as a soloist in his quintet to a far greater extent than Mozart or Brahms, the quartet writing is by turns characterful, energetic and expressive, with its own sprinkling of virtuosity. Weber’s, not to mention Baermann’s, busy schedule meant the quintet’s composition was spread over several years, 1811-1815, the Rondo being completed just the day before the premiere, which I’m sure Baermann took in his stride.

The first movement begins quietly with the quartet, perhaps with Mozart’s model in mind, but lyricism is soon interrupted by the dramatic turbulence we might expect from Weber, and demanding virtuosity soon comes to the fore. The second movement Fantasia, a wide ranging aria, explores a darker and more expressive world, moving from inward lyricism to heroic statements, and contains two celebrated passages of two rapid chromatic scales, played loudly and then as a distant echo, to show what Weber and his friend Baermann were able to achieve together in virtuosity and dynamics. The third movement’s title Menuetto has the rug immediately pulled from under it with the qualifying words Capriccio and Presto. It’s a high spirited, talkative scherzo, tossing ideas between the instruments, with a contrasting long-lined Trio section intervening. The Rondo finale, using the rarer marking Allegro Gioioso (not a misprint!), is a virtuoso galop, a thrilling ride ending in cascades of triplets, although not before lyricism has reappeared with a long and searching melody.

© Mark van de Wiel

MARK VAN DE WIEL, *Clarinet*

Mark van de Wiel is long established as one of our leading clarinetists, appearing at major venues as a well-known soloist and chamber musician. Principal clarinet of the Philharmonia from 2000 to 2025, Mark is principal of the London Sinfonietta (since 2002) and previously of Welsh National Opera, the London Chamber Orchestra and Endymion. He has appeared as soloist with the Philharmonia (under conductors such as Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Edward Gardner and John Wilson), the London Sinfonietta, and the LCO (including a solo appearance at La Scala, Milan).

Noted for performances of contemporary music, Mark gave the world premiere of Joseph Phibbs's Clarinet Concerto which he jointly commissioned with the Philharmonia and Malmö Live Konserthus. Mark also performed the premiere of the Van der Aa concerto, *Hysteresis*, commissioned for him by the London Sinfonietta, among many other world and national premieres. He has played Boulez's *Domaines* at the Proms and Berio's *Sequenza* in the Sydney Opera House. Chamber music collaborators have included Vladimir Ashkenazy, Elizabeth Leonskaja, the Dante Quartet, and the Brodsky Quartet.

Recordings include the Nielsen Concerto with the Philharmonia and Paavo Järvi, the Joseph Phibbs and Mozart Concertos with the Philharmonia, LCO and Christopher Warren-Green, and Bartok's *Contrasts* with Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay and Yefim Bronfman on Signum.

Jonathan Dove's new clarinet concerto "Rainbow", jointly commissioned by Mark and the Philharmonia, will be released by Signum as part of a clarinet concerto album under Santtu. Mark's forthcoming Signum releases also include an album of Mozart and Joseph Phibbs (a new clarinet quintet jointly commissioned with Jouko Heikura) with the Brodsky Quartet, and a Peter Maxwell Davies clarinet album with the London Sinfonietta.

Mark is an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music, where he is a Professor, and has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Northampton University.



© Peter van den Berg

ZSOLT-TIHAMÉR VISONTAY, *Violin*

German-Hungarian violinist Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay began taking lessons at the music school in Magdeburg, and went on to study under Professor Jost Witter at the Schloss Belvedere Music School and the Franz Liszt Music Academy in Weimar. During his studies, Zsolt became a founding member of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra under the baton of Daniel Barenboim and later Concert Master of the the European Union Youth Orchestra (EUYO), performing under conductors such as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Bernard Haitink and Sir Colin Davis. Zsolt won the Concert Master position at the Philharmonic Orchestra Gera immediately after finishing his studies and shortly afterwards joined the Philharmonia Orchestra as Joint Concert Master at the age of 24. He is regularly invited as guest Concert Master in orchestras throughout the UK, Europe and the US. Those include Orchestre de Paris, London Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Vienna Radio Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony, Bamberg Symphony, DSO Berlin, Bergen Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Orchestra Nacional de Porto, Tampere Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Academy of St Martins in the Fields. He has collaborated with many illustrious conductors such as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Santtu Matias Rouvali, Christoph Von Dohnányi, Herbert Blomstedt, Lorin Maazel, Riccardo Muti, Andris Nelsons, Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, Lahav Shani, Xian Zhang, Susanna Mälkki, Kurt Masur, Klaus Mäkelä, Paavo Järvi, Jakub Hruša, Gustavo Dudamel, Simone Young and Elim Chan. He frequently records for film and TV soundtracks as both a concert master and solo artist. Zsolt is passionate about education and was the head of the Strings faculty of the I,Culture Orchestra, an organisation bringing together young musicians from Eastern European countries. He is currently Head of Strings for the Sinfonica Azteca Youth Orchestra in Mexico. In 2020, Zsolt was awarded the prestigious Saxony-Anhalt State Prize in Germany in recognition of his role as a cultural ambassador for the state and his international career.



FIONA CORNALL, *Violin*

Fiona studied the violin at the Purcell School of Music under Sybil Copeland and Jack Glickman before being awarded a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, where she studied with Lydia Mordkovich. During her time at the Academy, she received the Clarence Myerscough Trust Prize and the Lesley Alexander Award for outstanding performance.

Fiona has since enjoyed a diverse freelance career, performing with leading orchestras including the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano, BBC Philharmonic, Northern Sinfonia, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, English Chamber Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. She has also worked extensively in recording and session orchestras for Decca and EMI.

An active chamber musician, Fiona has performed in Japan and South America, as well as at major UK venues including the Purcell Room, Wigmore Hall and Buckingham Palace. Her solo violin playing has also featured in the BBC television series *Silent Witness*.

Fiona joined the Philharmonia Orchestra in February 2007 and in 2010 was appointed to the second violin No. 3 chair.



© Felix Broede

NICHOLAS BOOTIMAN, *Viola*

Nicholas Bootiman enjoys a distinctive dual career as conductor and violist. As a violist, he has held principal roles with some of the UK's leading orchestras, including a decade with the Philharmonia Orchestra and, more recently, as Principal Viola of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He is in regular demand as a guest principal, regularly performing with orchestras across the UK and internationally, whilst also working as a session musician for film and television. Nicholas

obtained degrees at the Royal College of Music in London before continuing his training in Prague and at the New England Conservatory in Boston, studying with Milan Škampa and Kim Kashkashian. These formative experiences fostered a deep engagement with both the solo and chamber repertoire, as well as a strong interest in historically informed performance and subsequent immersion in orchestral repertoire. As conductor, Nicholas has assisted Jérémie Rhorer on major opera productions at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg. His experiences as a conductor and player guide the artistic process of his own ensemble, a groundbreaking orchestra based in the Chiltern Hills. As co-founder of Echor Music, Nicholas curates and leads innovative projects that place music in direct collaboration with text, theatre, dance and visual art, creating performances that are intimate and imaginative, deeply engaging audiences.



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KAREN STEPHENSON, *Cello*

Born in Stoke-on-Trent and brought up in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Karen studied 'cello with Emma Ferrand and read Music at Trinity College, Cambridge. She completed her PostGraduate study at the Royal Academy of Music under David Strange. A former Principal 'cello of the National and European Youth Orchestras, Karen has held positions in the BBC Philharmonic and Concert Orchestras, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and since 2008, the position of Co-Principal 'cello in the Philharmonia. She left the Philharmonia in January 2025 and is now a regular guest Principal 'cello with a number of ensembles, including the Philharmonia, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Symphony, Philharmonic, Scottish and Concert Orchestras. Karen also works regularly in the Session world - notably with COOL Music - and can be heard on many film and TV soundtracks from Call the Midwife to Harry Potter and most recently, on Conjuring, the Last Rites! Karen has dueted with many of the world's greatest classical stars including Maxim Vengerov and Nigel Kennedy. She often appears as a soloist - such as in Karl Jenkins's Benedictus from The Armed Man which was broadcast live on Classic FM and performed in front of Harry and Meghan! She was also honoured to play at the Coronation of King Charles III in Westminster Abbey in 2023. She plays a beautiful modern 'cello made by Marc Soubeyran of Ludlow (and her cello is called Marc!); her bow is made by Stephan Thomachot of Paris. Karen loves touring the world, and has enjoyed fabulous trips to the USA, Europe, Japan and South America; her favourite concert halls include the Lincoln Center, New York, the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam and the Suntory Hall, Tokyo. However, she is happiest when she is at her home in Bedfordshire, surrounded by her family, (husband David and son Jack), 2 chickens and their 3 cats.



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Rhapsody for Clarinet & String Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 23 - June Emerson

Clarinet Quintet in B-Flat Major, Op.34, J. 182 - Breitkopf

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