

## Noah MAX SONGS OF LONELINESS: SOLOS, DUOS AND TRIOS

Raymond Brien, clarinet Philip Haworth, oboe Robert Max, cello James Kirby, piano Zoë Solomon, piano The Barbican Piano Trio Members of The Brompton Quartet

## NOAH MAX, ALL-ROUND ARTIST by Martin Anderson

Time was when composers were all-round musicians as a matter of course. Telemann is probably the most dazzling example: perhaps the most prolific composer of all time,<sup>1</sup> he was also a conductor, music director of churches (six at a time) and opera houses, teacher, engraver and publisher of his own music - and he still had time for hobbies, one of which was horticulture. Mozart wrote his piano concertos with himself in mind as performer. Beethoven was the prince of Viennese pianists until deafness put an end to life on the stage. Berlioz was a virtuoso flautist and perhaps the first truly modern conductor. Liszt was the most dazzling piano virtuoso of his day, and a conductor, organist and teacher, as well as being a composer with an ear for the radical. Bruckner's reputation in his own day was as much as an organist of international repute and a highly regarded and influential teacher, of composition and music theory, as well as organ, as for his symphonies. What was true of the major men of music was also true of the minor ones: a court or city composer, whether a celebrity or a provincial Kapellmeister, would be expected to make music, as well as create it. The change began with Wagner: though he was an important conductor in the early part of his career, composition later became a specialism, and he put down his baton. Since then, composers who only compose have become the norm; they have often still taught, usually because they have to make a living, but those who were also executant musicians have gradually become fewer and fewer in number.

Noah Max will doubtless blush to see his name mentioned in such company, but in these days of narrow specialisations, he is very much an exception to prove the modern rule: he began his musical life as a cellist and is now active as both composer

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Telemann's output of cantatas alone is staggering: he wrote some 1,700, of which around 1,400 survive.

and conductor. Either activity would be enough for most young musicians approaching their mid-twenties, but Max doesn't stop there: he is also a poet, a film-maker and a remarkably accomplished artist, as the paintings online on his website – www. noahmax.net/artist – make clear. They are explosions of colour and energy; though they range from the representational to the abstract, they are linked by their sense of spontaneity – and my guess is that it is spontaneity that allows the multiplicity of all these talents to blossom, that they must be as natural to him as they are impressive to everyone else, and that this spontaneity allows his creativity to function without the inhibitions one might otherwise expect. His relentless productivity – in its various categories – would seem to require an explanation along these lines.

Noah Max was born in 1998 and grew up in a household of musicians in North London: his parents are the cellist Robert Max and pianist Zoë Solomon. At the age of three, he took his first cello lesson, with Wendy Max, his grandmother. He went on to study, for seven years, with William Bruce, Head of Strings at the Junior Department of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.<sup>2</sup> He then took lessons with Felix Schmidt, Professor of Cello at the Royal Academy of Music – who, as himself a student of Maurice Gendron, William Pleeth and Mstislav Rostropovich, brought the teenage Max into a long line of distinguished cellists. Concurrently, he studied at the Purcell School for Young Musicians (in Bushey, to the north-west of London), where the composer Simon Speare taught him composition and inspired him to pursue a career as a composer in his own right. It was there, too, that he began conducting, setting up his Echo Ensemble to give him an outlet for another of his enthusiasms. (It took its name from Max's *Three Echoes* (2016) for chamber orchestra, which was the first piece it performed.)

Even allowing for that early start, his output as a composer has been substantial: he has written works for chamber ensembles large and small, music for symphony and string orchestras, choral pieces and educational works for young musicians. His compositions have been premiered at the Royal Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall and the Elgar Room of the Royal Albert Hall in London, as well as the Musikverein in Vienna, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In 2020 Noah Max recorded a conversation with his erstwhile teacher, online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBmO\_\_O9cH0.



Noah Max, Self Portrait IV, oil on canvas, July 2018

Uilenburgersjoel Synagogue in Amsterdam and the Ignacy Jan Paderewski Academy of Music in Poznań. He has worked with the Piatti Quartet, Ebor Singers, Marryat Players, The Brompton Quartet, Roadrunner Trio and Echo Ensemble, of which he is Creative Director. His pieces have featured in concerts curated by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Riot Ensemble. Commissions include Eulogy for an Imagined Pitch (2019) for the Moonlight Ensemble, ...to the world without Time... (2021) for the pianist Thomas Kelly, and Hymn to the Chasm (2022), a work for violin and fixed-media electronics, to accompany an exhibition of sculptures by the artist Marie-Thérèse Ross. In 2017 his choral work Ave, Regina Caelorum was selected for the finals of the National Centre for Early Music Composition Award, and Three Echoes for chamber orchestra was shortlisted for the BBC Proms 'Inspire' Competition. In 2021 his string trio Sojourn won The Clements Prize for Composers at Conway Hall, Musical Opinion describing it as 'an engaging new work for an exacting medium',<sup>3</sup> and the online Arts Desk finding it 'mercurial in character, detailed in scoring and with echoes of Barber in its fragile slow movement.<sup>4</sup> His music is published by United Music Publishing and performance materials are available from their website.<sup>5</sup>

Noah Max's Jewish background naturally forms an important part of his outlook, and it has recently been directly reflected in his music: he spent the larger part of 2021 writing a chamber opera, his first work for the stage. In two acts and scored for chamber forces, it is based in Poland during the Holocaust, and at the time of writing, negotiations for the first performance are under way. Explaining the stimulus behind the work, Noah wrote to me as the preparations for this release were progressing: 'I see the Holocaust as the loss of humanity's innocence. It was revealed to every future generation the pure evil we are capable of if we are not careful'.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Paul Conway, Musical Opinion, July-September 2018, p. 53.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Bernard Hughes, The Arts Desk, 18 October 2021: https://www.theartsdesk.com/classical-music/clements-prize-conway-hall-review-newly-written-string-trios-competition.

<sup>5</sup> https://ump.co.uk/composer/noah-max/.

<sup>6</sup> E-mail dated 7 January 2022.



As a conductor, Noah Max has championed contemporary repertoire with the Endymion Ensemble at the Wigmore Hall, toured with the Divertimento Ensemble through northern Italy, and with the Echo Ensemble, which – pandemic notwithstanding – gave more than 50 world premieres in 2021. He was a Britten-Pears Young Artist mentored by Marin Alsop, a London Sinfonietta Academy participant, Assistant Conductor to Jonathan Cohen and Arcangelo for their production of Handel's *Theodora* at the BBC Proms in 2018 and Young Associate Conductor of Sir Matthew Bourne's *The Red Shoes* in 2019–20.

His artwork has been displayed at the National Portrait Gallery in London. Ronald Corp, Zeo Fawcett and Sarah Frances Jenkins have set his poems to music. As with Telemann and his gardening, Noah Max finds time in this crowded life for hobbies, among them skiing, reading and listening to David Bowie. He resides digitally at www. noahmax.net and his 'Living Portfolio' can be found at www.vimeo.com/noahmax.

This first album of his compositions is unified by the sense of loss pervading almost everything recorded here; where the music does not seem to be grieving, it is angry. That awareness of innocence forgone is characteristic of the music of many English composers in the first half of the twentieth century – Elgar, Finzi, Howells and Vaughan Williams come immediately to mind – and there is perhaps something of Satie (whose mother was Scots) in the elliptical elegance of some of the more delicate pieces. But the works of these men that embody the notion of the transience of beauty were generally products of their middle and old age; that a composer just entering his twenties should tap into the same vein of sadness and elegy a century later is downright startling.

The details of the works confirm that general impression: six of these seven pieces are concerned with loss or with some kind of tragedy. The title of *Songs of Loneliness* is direct enough – but the final movement gives the knife another twist: it is headed with a Kafkaesque 'False Dawn'. *Constellations* and *Sojourn* are reflections on mortality. Mention the word 'sonnet' to most people and their minds will automatically reach for 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' – and yet Max's *Sunset Sketches: Three Sonnets for Solo Piano* are concerned with the passage from light to darkness. The piano piece *It Comes in Waves* was prompted by the death of a close friend. *Vignette* closes in an atmosphere of profound sorrow.

Martin Anderson founded Toccata Classics in 2005 and publishes books on classical music as Toccata Press; he also writes on music for various publications in Britain and abroad. His degree (from the University of St Andrews, in 1977) was in mediaeval French and German, and thereafter he worked in economics for twenty years, in London and in Paris.

## MY SONGS OF LONELINESS by Noah Max

Playing chamber music taught me how to listen and how to collaborate. The spirit of chamber music is at the heart of everything I do and imbues all the music I write. This album of solos, duos and trios explores some of the ideas which shaped me.

Songs of Loneliness (2019–20) is a musical portrayal of solitude which combines expansive melodies with spectral sounds. It was written for my parents at the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown; the music was inspired by their beautiful playing and the musical nourishment they have shared with me over many years. The first and last movements, *Maestoso un poco mosso* 1 and 'False Dawn' [4], both follow broad melodic arcs inspired by Rachmaninov's writing in his Sonata for Piano and Cello, Op. 19. The inner movements are more unsettling. The low rumbles of *Ruvido con orrore* [2] emerge as though from the underworld; the strings of the piano are dampened with Blu Tack to create an eerie, percussive timbre. Then the glittering natural harmonics of 'Like a warm lamp swinging softly through darkness' [3] float down from a higher realm.

Of all the suffering in the world there is none so isolating as the struggle with our own mortality. *Constellations* (2018–19) for solo clarinet 5 is dedicated to Rachael Hannigan, who faced a potentially life-threatening illness with unfathomable bravery. The music swings between intimate lyrical sections and immensely frenetic passages, which are structured around spectral harmonies created by clarinet multiphonics.

The poet Neil Rollinson described the sonnet form to me as 'a little box of sense': perfectly wrought, incredibly powerful and yet fleeting and enigmatic. *Sunset Sketches: Three Sonnets for Solo Piano* (2020) aims to capture the aesthetic of the sonnet while painting the glorious sunset in Frinton-on-Sea, where most of the music on this album was written. As the sun sets, the music becomes

increasingly abstract. The first piece, 'Dusk' (5), is swept along by a simple, pensive tune. In 'Sunset' (7) a chorale-like blend of melody and harmony gives way to a contrapuntal middle section. The third and final movement, 'Stars' (8), has barely any melodic shape at all: it has become almost pure harmony. The sustaining pedal is held down throughout the final movement, the blurring together of different chords creating the feeling of endless cosmic space.

Sojourn (2017) for string trio is a meditation on mortality, in a style different from that of *Constellations*. Melanie Daiken (1945–2016) was a student of Olivier Messiaen in Paris, where she also knew Samuel Beckett. She was a brilliantly iconoclastic composer, and a mentor and inspiration to me. As Deputy Head of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music, Mel taught my parents Music History classes and remained a close friend of our family thereafter. For many years she remained resilient in the face of deteriorating health. I will always be grateful to her and hope this piece is a fitting tribute to her bubbly character and riotous, volatile, thoroughly original compositional voice. *Introduzione* <sup>[9]</sup> and *Mysterioso* <sup>[10]</sup> explore the timbral variety of the string trio and the melodic possibilities presented by hexachordal combinatoriality, a technique which involves slicing twelve-tone rows in half and reordering them. The listener is then catapulted into a *Furioso* <sup>[13]</sup> before concluding with a vicious Finale <sup>[14]</sup>.

As a painter, I find that exploring form, texture and colour lends valuable context to my work as a composer. Occasionally, during an impassioned spell of painting, I will work so deeply into a canvas that I tear right through it. It struck me recently that when that happens, the tear is not only in the canvas but also in the fabric of Being: life goes on, and the hole looks smaller in the context of the whole, but truthfully it will always remain the same size and can never be filled. In December 2018 a tragic traffic collision ended the life of my friend Alex Ross (1999–2018). Those who knew Alex remember him with deep love and affection. *It Comes in Waves* 15 is dedicated to his memory and is performed by James Kirby, who grew up near Alex's home town of Binbrook in Lincolnshire.

*Cornucopia: Three Bagatelles for Solo Oboe* (2020) attempts to fold the melodrama of a nineteenth-century opera into a single oboe line. An abrasive *Moto perpetuo* soliloquy 17 punctuated by multiphonics is bookended by two expansive arias, one more plaintive in character 16, the other an acrobatic *coloratura* movement 18.

*Vignette* (2018–19) for piano trio <u>19</u> distils into six minutes a narrative which embodies both truth and fantasy. It is inspired by a visit I made to Paris while reading the surreal writings of the Austrian author Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931). An unlikely marriage of these influences is represented through a mercurial progression of conflicts and confluences between the three instruments. In the wake of the dramatic climax, the cello plays a melodic fragment shrouded by the harmonic halo of the violin and the pealing of cathedral bells in the piano. This fragment was later to blossom into the first movement of *Songs of Loneliness*, bringing the album full circle. I am grateful to the Barbican Piano Trio for commissioning *Vignette* and for giving its world premiere at the Frinton Festival in May 2019.

Robert Max (cello) enjoys a career that weaves together solo performance, chamber music, conducting and teaching. He has given recitals and performed concertos throughout the UK, Europe, Russia and the USA. He has been cellist of the Barbican Piano Trio for over 30 years and is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music. He has taught at the Junior Academy since 1992 and has coached chamber music at MusicWorks since its inception in 2001. He is principal cellist of the London Chamber Orchestra and conducts the Oxford Symphony and the North London Symphony Orchestra. His recording of Bach's Six Suites for Solo Cello was released by Guild Music in September 2020. He is an Honorary Professor of the Rachmaninov Institute in Tambov (Rachmaninov's summer residence was at Ivanovka, in Tamboy Province).



Photograph: Claude Darmor

Zoë Solomon, piano, has performed as soloist, chamber musician and accompanist in the UK, Europe and the USA, and has made live recordings for BBC Radio 3, Greater London Radio, Classic FM and for Danish and German Radio. She studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London and in Cleveland, USA. Her qualities as a chamber musician and accompanist have attracted special attention. She performed with Ian Bostridge for Graham Johnson's Young Songmakers' Almanac and with Maxim Vengerov on the BBC Two television series *The Score*. She was invited to accompany Robert Tear at St John's, Smith Square, in central London, performed Beethoven Sonatas with Ralph Kirshbaum at the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh and has accompanied Tim Hugh in recital. She has also accompanied classes at Prussia Cove and the London International Masterclasses. She has performed

Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra and piano concertos by Mozart with the Hampstead Sinfonia and the Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra. She travelled to New York to perform piano quartets with the principal string players of the London Symphony Orchestra. She is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.

**Raymond Brien** is a clarinettist, composer and Artistic Director of The Thinking Minds Project, which brings together performers, improvisers, composers and visual artists to create immersive artistic experiences for audiences. He was a Gillian-Freddie Martin Scholar at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama between 2016 and 2020 and a Britten-Pears Young Artist in 2020. He was selected for the London Sinfonietta Academy and Birmingham Contemporary Music Group 'Next' Programme. A passionate advocate for new music, he recently appeared at the Mostly Modern Festival in New York. Recent solo highlights include appearing on the BBC's 'Total Immersion' series at the Barbican Centre and performing Sir Harrison Birtwistle's *Linoi* for BBC Radio 3. He composed four works for the Echo Ensemble, which were given online and live



premieres during their 2020-21 season, and his piece Octo20 for bass clarinet and fixed-media electronics was commissioned by Birmingham Contemporary Music Group. He is a co-founder of the experimental-music ensemble Egnairio Duo, which released its first collaborative album, Alembic, a digital release from the music-sharing platform Bandcamp, in 2021.

Maja Horvat (violin) plays unknown gems from the twentieth century, as well as contemporary works and celebrated masterpieces. She made her Wigmore Hall debut as first violinist of The Brompton Quartet, of which she is a founding member. In 2019 she was awarded the Emily Anderson Prize of the Royal Philharmonic Society. She has performed as a soloist with the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Mendelssohn Chamber Orchestra and has been concert-master of the Echo Ensemble and the Royal College of Music Symphony and Philharmonic Orchestras. As a Leverhulme Arts Scholar at the RCM she has worked with internationally acclaimed performers, including Nicola Benedetti, Ivry Gitlis, Alina Ibragimova, Leonid Kerbel, Daniel Rowland and Maxim Vengerov.

A proud Varsovian, the violist Kinga Wojdalska received her early musical training in her native city. In 2021 she completed a Bachelor's degree at the Royal College of Music and is currently studying with Lawrence Power for her Master's at the Zurich Hochschule der Künste. Among other awards, she won the Karl Doktor Prize at the 2019 Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition. Her endeavours have been supported by scholarships from the Hattori Foundation, the Musicians' Company and the Countess of Munster Musical Trust. She has performed in the Musikverein in Vienna, Jordan Hall in Boston and Wigmore Hall in London, as well as the Encuentro de Santander Festival in Spain and West Wycombe Chamber Music Festival. Chamber music is her passion, and she has shared stages







with such instrumentalists as Vilde Frang, Ivan Monighetti and Miklós Perényi. In 2016 she co-founded the ensemble Kameralna N-Harmonia and has been the violist of The Brompton Quartet since 2020. She has performed in master-classes with Nobuko Imai, Maxim Rysanov and Máté Szűcs. She plays a modern viola made by Jerzy Maslanka.

Wallis Power is a versatile freelance cellist and cello teacher based in London. A graduate of Cambridge University and The Royal College of Music, she has appeared with the English National Opera Orchestra, Glyndebourne Tour Orchestra, The Philharmonia, Oxford Philharmonic and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. In summer 2021 she took part in the London Sinfonietta Academy and performed in Mahler's Fifth Symphony with the Proms Festival Orchestra at the BBC Proms. She is a founding member of The Brompton Quartet.

**Philip Haworth** (oboe) began his studies at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he recorded the premiere of Edwin Roxburgh's oboe trio *Shadow Play* with the renowned oboist Paul Goodey. During his time at the RNCM he won numerous prizes, among them the Cronshaw Lancaster Prize for Wind, the Evelyn Rothwell Oboe Prize and a Henry Wood Scholarship. He is now a guest oboe tutor at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, nurturing the potential of young oboists. He shares his passion for new music as a member of the Riot Ensemble, which has taken him on tour across the UK, around Europe and beyond. He has recently worked with the Orchestra of Opera North, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia, the Hallé, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, the London Mozart Players, the Orchestra of St John's, Den Fynske Opera in Denmark





and the Lapland Chamber Orchestra in Finland. As a member of the Atéa Wind Quintet, he has toured extensively around Europe and Japan. The group is Associate Ensemble-in-Residence at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Atéa were previously Artists-in-Residence at the Purcell School and double prizewinners in the 2015 Carl Nielsen International Chamber Music Competition. He is also a tutor at Dartington International Festival, Malvern Winds and the Wind Ensemble Retreat in Yorkshire.

**Sophie Lockett**, violin, has been fascinated by chamber music since she was a child, and it has always been an integral part of her life. As a teenager she led the Mimosa Quartet, later the Cavell Quartet, and now the Holywell Quartet. She has been the violinist in the Barbican Piano Trio since 2009. She leads a busy freelance career, working with the London Chamber Orchestra, London Contemporary Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia and Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra. She is the leader of Albert's Orchestra, the in-house orchestra of the Royal Albert Hall, and its educational ensemble, Albert's Band. She teaches the violin and chamber music at both the Royal Academy of Music Junior Department and Eton College. In 2017 she was made an Honorary Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.



James Kirby has given piano recitals at the Wigmore Hall, the Edinburgh and Aldeburgh Festivals and in venues across Europe. He studied at the Moscow Conservatoire and returns regularly to perform and lead chamber-music courses in Russia. He has given concerto performances with the English and Scottish Chamber Orchestras and the Moscow Symphony Orchestra in the Royal Albert Hall and the Royal Opera House in London, Symphony Hall in Birmingham and in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire. For 30 years he has been a member of the Barbican Piano Trio. He is a dedicated teacher and enjoys his posts at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Royal Holloway University of London and Eton College. He is an



Honorary Professor of the Rachmaninov Institute in Tambov. He gives master-classes in the UK and overseas and has served on the juries of competitions in Hong Kong, Korea, Latvia, Romania, Russia and Slovenia.

The **Barbican Piano Trio** – Sophie Lockett (violin), Robert Max (cello) and James Kirby (piano) – has been regarded as one of the UK's leading ensembles for over three decades. The Trio has appeared in major festivals and concert series, including Blackheath, Bridgnorth Haydn Festival, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, City of London, Frinton Festival, Garsington, Guildford, Harrogate, Leeds, Oxford, Rye, Sheffield, Spitalfields, the St Jude's Proms, Three Spires and Warwick. It visits Scotland frequently and has appeared at Queen's Hall, Edinburgh, on several occasions. The Trio has given many performances at the Wigmore Hall, a special highlight being performances of all of Beethoven's Piano Trios in the Master Concert Series. In Europe the Trio has given concerts in Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Romania, Russia, Spain and Sweden. Further afield, it has toured the Far East, South America, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. It has visited the USA five times, performed in major venues that include the Weill Recital Hall in Carnegie Hall and in Boston, Chicago, Los



Photograph: Sam Pearce, Square Image Photography

Jean Françaix, Paul Schoenfield and Hugh Wood. First performances given by the Trio include works by Timothy Baxter, James Francis Brown, Bill Campbell, Artiom Kim, Peter Lawson, David Matthews, Noah Max and Joseph Phibbs. Its discography on ASV, Black Box, Dutton and Guild features music by Alan Bush, Ireland, Lalo, Mendelssohn, Rachmaninov, Schnittke, Taneyev and Tchaikovsky.



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## NOAH MAX Songs of Loneliness: Solos, Duos and Trios

Songs of Loneliness: Sonatine for Cello and I           I         Maestoso un poco mosso           II         Ruvido con orrore; senza misura           III         Like a warm lamp swinging softly thro           IV         False Dawn; finale		<b>14:11</b> 3:44 2:05 3:57 4:25
<b>5</b> Constellations for solo clarinet (2018–19)		9:52
Sunset Sketches: Three Sonnets for Solo Piano 6 No. 1 Dusk 7 No. 2 Sunset 8 No. 3 Stars	9 (2020)	<b>7:02</b> 1:59 2:30 2:33
Sojourn (in memoriam Melanie Daiken) for str         I       Introduzione         II       II Mysterioso         III       III Furioso         II       IV Intermezzo         IV       V Maestoso         IV       Vi Finale	<b>ing trio</b> (2017)	8:04 1:55 1:13 1:13 0:19 2:21 1:03
If Comes in Waves (in memoriam Alex Ross) for solo piano (2018–19)		11:24
Cornucopia: Three Bagatelles for Solo Oboe (2020)         Is         No. 1         In         No. 2 Moto perpetuo         Is         No. 3 Open and plentiful         Is         Vignette for piano trio (2018–19)		<b>5:38</b> 1:47 1:42 2:09 <b>6:02</b>
		TT 62:13
Raymond Brien, clarinet 5	The Barbican Piano Trio 🗉	
Philip Haworth, oboe 10–18 Zoë Solomon, piano 1–46–8 Members of the Brompton Quartet 9–14 Maja Horvat, violin Kinga Wojdalska, viola	Sophie Lockett, violin 19 Robert Max, cello 11–4 James Kirby, piano 15	FIRST RECORDINGS

Wallis Power, cello