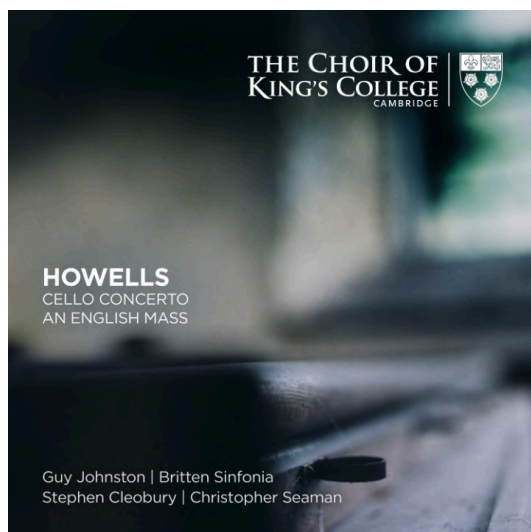


Guy Johnston's recording of Howells' haunting *Cello Concerto* released on the King's College Cambridge Label on 7 June



Friday 7 June

King's College | KGS0032

Howells *Cello Concerto*

Guy Johnston cello
Britten Sinfonia
Christopher Seaman
conductor

"Hauntingly searching and nostalgic, it is a story told from the heart."

Guy Johnston

Following the posthumous premiere in 2016, cellist **Guy Johnston** has recorded **Herbert Howells'** haunting ***Cello Concerto*** for the **King's College** label for release **on 7 June**. The work was recorded in the resonant **King's College Chapel** alongside the **Britten Sinfonia** conducted by **Christopher Seaman**.



Watch the CD trailer here: <https://youtu.be/CKcA1S-WguY>

To mark his retirement after 37 years as Director of Music at King's College Cambridge, **Stephen Cleobury**, now President of the Herbert Howells Society, has chosen to record a double-disc set of Howells' music including the *Concerto* and *The English Mass*. As a former chorister under Cleobury, Johnston reconnects with his choral roots in recording Howells, best known for his many Canticle settings including his *Collegium Regale* written for the Choir of King's College.

The *Cello Concerto*, started by Howells following the tragic death of his son, was only completed 30 years after the composer's death, and was first brought to Guy's attention by his mentor, Steven Isserlis at a memorial service for late Sir John Tavener at Westminster Abbey, where Howells' ashes were interred.



Guy Johnston gave the posthumous premiere of the work at Cheltenham Festival in 2016 at Gloucester Cathedral, close to where Howells' son is buried and where the composer received his first composition lessons in preparation for his Royal College of Music scholarship audition. For the recording, Johnston performed on a **Montagnana cello** loaned by Steven Isserlis.



Herbert Howells first began sketching his *Cello Concerto* in 1933, but was struck by tragedy in 1935 when his nine-year-old son Michael contracted polio, dying three days later. The composer ultimately never recovered from his son's death, and used composition as a means of dealing with his grief. He never finished the *Cello Concerto*, which he often worked on around the anniversary of his son's death in a sort of mourning ritual. Howells saw the cello as 'an extension of the male voice' and in this highly personal *Concerto*, there can be no doubt that the voice is markedly his own.

The *Concerto* was finally completed in 2014 by musicologist **Jonathan Clinch**, who worked from extensive sketches and an extant first movement to fill out the missing harmony. This first movement – submitted separately as a 'Fantasia' for Howell's DMus in Oxford – draws on the model of Vaughan William's own *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. The *Concerto* as a whole makes use of modal and chromatic harmonies and false relations, drawing on Tudor influences; Howells had concurrently been editing the Tudor Church Music series.

Guy Johnston commented:

"Howells considered the inner movement of the Cello Concerto, the Threnody, to be one of his finest works, yet he never finished it, nor the third movement. The piece has a nervous, almost angry side to it – but there are moments where the music dances in 7/8 time, and in the end the concerto



seems to offer release with a surprisingly joyful resolve. But it is the Threnody that is at the heart of the work. There is evidence to suggest at one point that this movement was being considered for two solo instruments, including a viola. I imagine this could have been to emphasise the relationship and dialogue between father and son."

The recording is Johnston's second CD with the King's College Label, following the successful release of **Tecchler's Cello: From Cambridge to Rome** in 2017. Marking the 300th anniversary of the creation of Johnston's David Tecchler instrument, the cellist recorded 3 new commissions from composers including Ola Gjeilo, and collaborated with pianist Tom Poster, cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason, the Orchestra of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, and his brother, violinist Magnus Johnston. Last year, Johnston was invited to perform at Stephen Cleobury's last *Nine Lessons and Carols* from King's performing a new carol by Judith Weir heard by 30 million people across the globe.

This recording of the *Cello Concerto* was made possible by the Herbert Howells Trust and key supporters. The double-disc set of orchestral and choral music by Howells features *The English Mass*, and *Te Deum* and *Magnificat* taken from his *Collegium Regale* performed by the Choir of King's College and King's Voices Choir, conducted by Stephen Cleobury. The disc also includes his *Paean*, *Master Tallis' Testament* and *Rhapsody no. 3* for organ. The Choir of King's College's most recent disc, *100 Years of Nine Lessons & Carols*, spent nine consecutive weeks at the top of the UK Specialist Classical Charts.

Upcoming performances for Guy Johnston include an appearance at the **Wigmore Hall** on **8 June** and a European Tour with the **Amsterdam Sinfonietta**. Johnston appears at **Purbeck Chamber Music Festival** from **29-31 August**, and from **25-28 September**, he resumes his role as Artistic Director of **Hatfield House Chamber Music Festival**, which this year features a new commission by Mark Simpson alongside performances by artists including Katya Apekisheva, Charles Owen, Nicholas Daniel, Julian Bliss, and the Navarra Quartet.

Listings

8 June

Wigmore Hall

4-9 July

Amsterdam Sinfonietta

4 August

Moritzburg Festival

29-31 August

Purbeck Chamber Music Festival

26-29 September

Hatfield House Chamber Music Festival

Pour l'Amour de la Musique

Guy Johnston artistic director
Artists include **Katya Apekisheva, Charles Owen, Nicholas Daniel, Julian Bliss,** and the **Navarra Quartet**

Guy Johnston



Guy Johnston is one of the most exciting and versatile British cellists of his generation. Born into a musical family, Guy joined his brothers in the world-renowned choir of King's College, Cambridge, where he recorded the famous carol *Once in Royal David's City*, under Stephen Cleobury. He went on to achieve important early successes through the BBC Young Musician of the Year title, the Guilhermina Suggia Gift, the Shell London Symphony Orchestra Gerald MacDonald Award and receiving a Classical Brit Award at the Royal Albert Hall. His mentors have included Steven Doane, Ralph Kirshbaum, Bernard Greenhouse, Anner Bylsma as well as Steven Isserlis and David Waterman at IMS Prussia Cove.

Guy has performed at chamber music festivals and with orchestras around the world and more recently with the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Japan, a premiere performance of the Howells concerto at the Cheltenham Festival, and a new cello concerto by Charlotte Bray commissioned for the BBC Proms. He is Artistic Director of the Hatfield House Chamber Music Festival and enjoys teaching a class of young cellists at the Royal Academy of Music as well as being a patron of the Pierre Fournier Award. Guy plays a 1714 David Tecchler cello, generously on loan from the GodleeTecchler Trust which is administered by The Royal Society of Musicians. He has recently commissioned a number of short new works to celebrate its tricentenary by composers including Charlotte Bray, David Matthews and Mark Simpson. Guy has recently joined the cello teaching faculty at the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, New York.

For more information on any of the above, please contact:

Nicky Thomas Media

101 Bell Street, London NW1 6TL

+44 (0)20 3714 7594 | +44 (0)20 7258 0909

info@nickythomasmedia.com

www.nickythomasmedia.com