

Nicolas Hodges pairs Beethoven with Birtwistle on disc



6 November 2020
WERGO | WER 6860 2

Beethoven *Fantasy op. 77*
Birtwistle *Variations from the Golden Mountain* **FIRST RECORDING**
Beethoven *Bagatelles op. 126*
Birtwistle *Gigue Machine* **FIRST RECORDING**
Beethoven *Allegretto, WoO 61*
Birtwistle *Dance of the metro-gnome* **FIRST RECORDING**

"He plays the classics as if they were written yesterday, and what was written yesterday as if it were already a classic."

Tempo Magazine

In a new solo album to be released on **6 November 2020**, pianist **Nicolas Hodges** pairs **Birtwistle with Beethoven** in ***A Bag of Bagatelles*** on **Wergo**.

The disc was recorded in November 2019 in the presence of Sir Harrison Birtwistle himself; Hodges enjoys a close relationship with the composer, who described him as *"becoming like my Peter Pears"*. It includes the first recordings of three works by Sir Harrison Birtwistle and originally premiered by Hodges, including the witty *Dance of the metro-gnome* which sets the pianist against an impish metronome, and the virtuosic *Gigue Machine* of 2011, with its ceaseless warp and weft driven by a musical machine whose operation defies logic. *Gigue Machine* won the best Instrumental Solo BASCA British Composers Award in 2013.

Birtwistle's *Variations from the Golden Mountain*, premiered by Hodges in 2014, features precipitous changes in mood and matter, like Beethoven's *Bagatelles, op. 126*. Hodges sets Birtwistle against Beethoven in his 250th anniversary year, also recording his *Fantasy op. 77* and *Allegretto, WoO 61*.

"his performance [of Beethoven's Bagatelles op. 126] was engrossing... What we heard was an authoritative, assured and, at times, stunning rendition of the bagatelles that brought out their many contrasts."

– Classical Melbourne, September 2014

Nicolas Hodges returned to the stage in September, appearing at Strasbourg's Festival Musica to perform **Simon Steen-Andersen's Piano Concerto** with the Basel Sinfonietta and Baldur Bronnimann. On 14-16 October, Nicolas Hodges performs Steen-Andersen's *Piano Concerto* with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Edward Gardner.

On **20 October** at Berlin's **Pierre Boulez Saal**, Hodges is joined by Michael Wendeborg in Debussy, Ravel and **Boulez's Structures I & II for two Pianos**, the two parts of a seminal work written over ten years that Boulez called "an experiment in what one might call Cartesian doubt."



On 10 November, Hodges will perform Philippe Manoury's *Passacaille pour Tokyo* (1994) in the Casa da Musica, Porto, with the Remix Ensemble.

Never shying away from challenging new writing, Nicolas Hodges continues to push the boundaries of modern piano music with bold and incisive performances. Hodges has long encouraged the creation of new contemporary repertoire for the piano. With an inexhaustible energy to communicate new music, Nicolas Hodges has commissioned over **25 piano concertos** to date.

By choosing to maintain close collaborative relationships with contemporary composers, Hodges presents an extraordinary first-hand insight into the music of today. He has premiered works by Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Thomas Adès, and Elliott Carter, premiering Gerard Barry's *Piano Concerto* in 2014.

Upcoming Performances

14-16 October, 19:30

Grieghallen, Bergen

Steen-Andersen *Piano Concerto*

Nicolas Hodges piano
Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra
Edward Gardner conductor

Tuesday 20 October, 19:30

Pierre Boulez Saal, Berlin

Debussy En blanc et noir for two Pianos
Boulez Structures I for two Pianos

Ravel La Valse – Poème
choréographique
Boulez Structures II for two Pianos

Nicolas Hodges piano
Michael Wendeborg piano

Tuesday 10 November

Fundação Casa da Música, Porto

Manoury *Passacaille pour Tokyo* (1994)

Nicolas Hodges piano
Remix Ensemble
Peter Rundel conductor

Nicolas Hodges



"Hodges... is one of the leading performers of advanced European music... He makes seemingly unintelligible music speak for itself... And is a pianist with a flabbergasting technique and instantly engaging musicality".

– LA Times, Mark Swed, 27th March 2018

An active and ever-growing repertoire that encompasses such composers as Beethoven, Berg, Brahms, Debussy, Schubert and Stravinsky reinforces pianist Nicolas Hodges' superior prowess in contemporary music. As *Tempo* magazine has written: *"Hodges is a refreshing artist; he plays the classics as if they were written yesterday, and what was written yesterday as if it were already a classic."*

Born in London and now based in Germany, where he is a professor at the Musikhochschule Stuttgart, Hodges approaches the works of Classical, Romantic, 20th century and contemporary composers with the same questing spirit, leading the Guardian to comment: *"Hodges' recitals always boldly go where few other pianists dare... with an energy that sometimes defies belief."* Nicolas Hodges' virtuosity and innate musicianship give him an assured command over the most strenuous technical complexities, making him a firm favourite among many of today's most prestigious contemporary composers. Collaborating closely with such contrasting figures as John Adams, Helmut Lachenmann and the late

Karlheinz Stockhausen is central to Hodges' career, and many of the world's most revered composers have dedicated works to him, including Thomas Adès, Gerald Barry, Elliott Carter, James Clarke, Francisco Coll, Hugues Dufourt, Pascal Dusapin, Beat Furrer, Isabel Mundry, Brice Pauset, Wolfgang Rihm and Miroslav Srnka. Hodges enjoys a particularly close relationship with Sir Harrison Birtwistle, who recently described him as "*becoming like my Peter Pears*." In September 2018, it was announced that the eminent composer, and longterm collaborator of Nicolas Hodges, Rebecca Saunders, had been selected by Roche Commissions as the 10th recipient in their commissioning series.

Recent performance highlights for Nicolas Hodges have included the premiere of Simon Steen-Andersen's award-winning Piano Concerto, performed with Francois-Xavier Roth and the SWR Symphony Orchestra Freiburg Baden-Baden as part of the Donaueschingen Festival in 2014, as well as the world premiere of *Variations from the Golden Mountains* by Sir Harrison Birtwistle at London's Wigmore Hall. Hodges also recently gave the world premiere of Gerald Barry's Piano Concerto, with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Peter Rundel, and the UK premiere with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Thomas Adès in Birmingham, followed by a repeat performance at the Aldeburgh Festival. He also gave the world premiere of Thomas Adès' own piano concerto *In Seven Days* with the London Sinfonietta, followed by further performances of the work with orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Further performance highlights for Hodges have included the world premiere performance of Elliott Carter's *Dialogues* for piano and orchestra, with the London Sinfonietta and Oliver Knussen, as well as the US and Berlin premieres of the work, with the Chicago Symphony and Berlin Philharmonic orchestras respectively – both conducted by Daniel Barenboim – and the New York premiere, at Carnegie Hall, with the MET Orchestra. Hodges also recently returned to the BBC Proms to perform Messiaen *Des canyons aux étoiles...* with Sakari Oramo and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, having performed the Ligeti Piano Concerto with the orchestra earlier in the season.

Hodges has established successful relationships with many of today's leading orchestras and ensembles, and engagements include regular performances with orchestras such as the BBC Symphony, Boston Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, hr-Sinfonieorchester Frankfurt, London Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony, MET Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg, Philharmonia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, St Louis Symphony, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich and WDR Sinfonieorchester Cologne, and ensembles such as ASKO/Schoenberg, Amsterdam, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Contrechamps Geneva, International Contemporary Ensemble New York and the Remix Ensemble, Porto.

Among the distinguished conductors with whom Nicolas Hodges regularly collaborates are Thomas Adès, Daniel Barenboim, George Benjamin, Martyn Brabbins, Sylvain Cambreling, James Levine, Susanna Mälkki, Cornelius Meister, Jonathan Nott, Emilio Pomarico, David Robertson, Pascal Rophé, François- Xavier Roth, Peter Rundel, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Pierre-André Valade, Ilan Volkov and Ryan Wigglesworth.

Also an avid chamber musician, Hodges has performed in Berlin (Musikfest), Brussels (Ars Musica), Hamburg (Ostertoene), Helsinki (Musica Nova), London (Barbican Centre, Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre and the BBC Proms), Lucerne (Festival), Madrid (INAEM), Melbourne International Arts Festival, New York (Carnegie Hall and Mostly Mozart), Paris (IRCAM and Festival d' Automne), Rome (IUC), Salzburg (Festival and Biennale), Strasbourg (Musica), Stuttgart (Eclat), Tanglewood (Festival), Tokyo, Vienna (Wien Modern) and Zurich (Tage für Neue Musik). He also collaborates regularly with the Arditti

Quartet, Adrian Brendel, Colin Currie, Ilya Gringolts, Anssi Karttunen, Michael Wendeberg, Carolin Widmann and has been a member of Trio Accanto since 2013.

Nicolas Hodges' varied discography includes Thomas Adès' piano concerto In Seven Days, with the London Sinfonietta and Thomas Adès (Signum Classics); two discs of works by Harrison Birtwistle; and a live recording of Luca Francesconi's piano concerto with the Orquestra Sinfónica Casa da Musica. On the Wergo label, Hodges has recorded "Voces Abandonadas", comprising works by Walter Zimmermann; a disc of works by Brice Pauset entitled "Canons for solo piano"; and "Songs and Poems", which includes repertoire by Hans Thomalla, Walter Zimmermann and Wolfgang Rihm with Trio Accanto.

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