



ALESSI JONES SINCLAIR

ORCHESTRA OF OPERA NORTH

WINDOWS

WORKS FOR TROMBONE

COMPOSED AND CONDUCTED BY BENJAMIN ELLIN

MUSIC BY BENJAMIN ELLIN

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1.-3. PANDORA Concerto for tenor trombone and orchestra (2010, rev. 2022) Soloist: Joseph Alessi | 24:31 |
| 1. I. Discovery | 6:33 |
| 2. II. The Deception of Fate | 5:59 |
| 3. III. Nocturne, Renaissance | 7:32 |
| 4. IV. Finale | 4:28 |
| 5.-7. 'STOW SKETCHES Trombone trio (2015) Joseph Alessi; Blair Sinclair; Christian Jones | 7:34 |
| 5. I. Hoe Street Demons | 2:11 |
| 6. II. William Morris Nocturne | 2:46 |
| 7. III. 'Pound a Bowl' | 2:37 |
| 8.-9. GRESLEY Concerto for bass trombone and orchestra (2020) Soloist: Christian Jones | 25:15 |
| 8. Part 1 | 10:55 |
| 9. Part 2 | 14:20 |
| 10. WINDOWS Trombone trio with orchestra (2022) Joseph Alessi; Blair Sinclair; Christian Jones | 7:05 |

Total time 64:26



PHOTO: MICK ARDRON

ORCHESTRA OF OPERA NORTH

FIRST VIOLINS

Melissa Carstairs (Guest Leader)
Andrew Long
Byron Parish
Anthony Banks
Brian Reilly
Tamsin Symons
Claire Osborne
Heloisa Ribeiro
Mackenzie Richards
Fiona Love

SECOND VIOLINS

Katherine New
Cristina Ocaña Rosado
Louise Latham
Helen Greig/
Jacqueline Cima
Alison Dixon
Jessica Graham
Shulah Oliver
Karolina Rudas

VIOLAS

David Aspin
Lourenço Macedo Sampaio
Anne Trygstad
Katie Jarvis
Joanna Wesling
Dani Sanxis

CELLOS

Sally Pendlebury
Daniel Bull
Amy Jolly
Damion Browne
Zöe Long
Sally Ladds

BASSES

Neil Tarlton
Claire Sadler
Diane Clarke
Evangeline Tang

FLUTES

Luke O' Toole
Imogen Royce

PICCOLO

Imogen Royce

OBOES

Richard Hewitt
Catherine Lowe

COR ANGLAIS

Catherine Lowe

CLARINETS

Andrew Mason
Sarah Masters

E♭ CLARINET

Andrew Mason

BASS CLARINET

Sarah Masters

BASSOONS

Adam Mackenzie
David Baker

HORNS

Alexander Hamilton
John Pratt
Kieran Lyster

TRUMPETS

Mark David
Michael Woodhead

TROMBONES

Blair Sinclair
Rory Cartmell

BASS TROMBONE

Christian Jones (Pandora)
Josh Cirtina (Gresley)

TUBA

Brian Kingsley

TIMPANI

Jonathan Phillips

PERCUSSION

Christopher Bradley
Mark Wagstaff
Michael Harper
Harry Percy

HARP

Rita Schindler

BENJAMIN ELLIN

Award-winning and critically acclaimed British conductor and composer Benjamin Ellin is currently co-founder and Musical Director of De Mowbray Music, Music Director of the Thursford Christmas Spectacular, co-founder, conductor and composer of the contemporary-fusion ensemble Tafahum and Principal Conductor of the Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra. Benjamin is also a founding trustee of the Evgeny Svetlanov Charitable Trust.

Benjamin has received commissions from orchestras and organisations across the world and in a variety of genres. Examples include his *Symphony No. 1* which was premiered in 2022 under Dmitri Jurowski, his oratorio *One Before Zero*, to commemorate the centenary of WW1 which was premiered in Amiens (France) in 2016 before being performed across Europe and he has also penned scores for independent films, cross-genre collaborations and many concerti, including the two featured on this album.

Ellin's belief in a musical world without boundaries is equalled by a tireless commitment as a Music Director and as a guest artist with leading ensembles across the globe. From 2006-2010 Benjamin was also Music Director of Pembroke Academy of Music in London, which provides vital musical education and opportunities to the young members of the Walworth community, London.



JOSEPH ALESSI

Joseph Alessi was appointed Principal Trombone of the New York Philharmonic in the spring of 1985. He began musical studies in his native California with his father, Joseph Alessi Sr. As a high school student in San Rafael, California, he was a soloist with the San Francisco Symphony before continuing his musical training at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music. Prior to joining the Philharmonic, Mr. Alessi was Second Trombone of The Philadelphia Orchestra for four seasons, and Principal Trombone of L'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal for one season. In addition, he has performed as guest Principal Trombonist with the London Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall led by Pierre Boulez.

Composed especially for Mr. Alessi, he performed the world premiere of the Chick Corea Trombone Concerto with the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra in August of 2021. In May of 2023 he performed the US premiere with the New York Philharmonic.

Mr. Alessi is currently on the faculty of The Juilliard School; his students now occupy posts with many major symphony orchestras in the U.S. and internationally.

Further information about Mr. Alessi can be found on his website, www.slidearea.com. Mr. Alessi plays exclusively on a Shires-Alessi model trombone.



CHRISTIAN JONES

Opera North bass and contrabass trombonist Christian Jones began playing at the age of ten, progressing through the excellent Staffordshire, Midland and National Youth Orchestras. Appointed to the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in 2001, aged twenty, Christian graduated from London's Royal Academy of Music with first class honours the following year. A month later, he joined the Philharmonia Orchestra and spent a decade recording soundtracks and performing around 150 concerts per year across the world. Since relocating to Yorkshire with his young family in 2012, Christian continues to work internationally, with recent faculty appearances across Europe.

Launched in 2017 as a study aid for students, Christian's YouTube channel currently features over 100 videos of solo works, technical advice and orchestral and operatic excerpts. He is using the footage as part of a performance-based PhD at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where he has also taught since 2015.

In October 2021, he gave the world premiere of the first ever bass trombone concerto commissioned by a professional British orchestra for one of its members: Benjamin Ellin's *Gresley* with the Orchestra of Opera North.

Aside from music, Christian can often be found running in mountains and swimming in cold seas!



BLAIR SINCLAIR

Originally from New Zealand, Blair completed his undergraduate studies at Victoria University of Wellington with tutors David Bremner and Marc Taddei. During this time he won the Second Trombone position with Orchestra Wellington, and worked with the Auckland Philharmonia and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras. He moved to the United Kingdom in 2005 where he completed a Masters degree at the Royal Academy of Music in London under tutors Ian Bousfield, Denis Wick and Dudley Bright. After graduating with a DipRAM, the highest accolade awarded to performers, Blair moved to Norway to take up the Solo Trombone position with the Stavanger Symfoniorkester. He returned to England in 2012 to join the Orchestra of Opera North as Principal Trombone, where he has also recently performed the Martin *Ballade* and Rota *Trombone Concerto*. He has performed as guest Principal Trombone with many of Britain's orchestras, including the London Symphony, Royal Opera House, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, BBC Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and Hallé orchestras.



NOTES FROM THE COMPOSER

When I first met Christian Jones I was a 16 year old tuba player from Bolton, Lancashire and we were on a National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain New Year course, my first ever experience with the 'NYO'. We bonded over a love of low, loud and sustained octaves in Prokofiev's 'Montagues and Capulets' and while our lives and work have followed slightly different paths, our friendship, mutual baldness and continued love of bass lines has firmly continued. Fast forward over two decades and the opportunity to both write a concerto for Christian and the Orchestra of Opera North as well as make a studio recording of the work makes us both smile at the idea that we could ever imagine doing this very project when NYO Professors and veritable legends Patrick Harrild and Peter Gane were giggling at us for trying to shake the foundations of the rehearsal hall during late December 1996!



'Legends' is a word I have used a lot when describing this album to others. Not about my work but rather about those people who have been pivotal at making the album a reality. Just over a decade after Christian and I had confirmed the stereotype of why low brass players like playing *forte*, I found myself submitting materials for a composition award in the USA, the Barlow Endowment Prize for Composition. Attracted to apply because I could send a representation of my work as a composer and not write the commission to which the prize pertained ahead of any submission, I sent off the application to be considered as the composer to pen a new concerto for Joseph Alessi – as I say, a veritable legend, whose recordings and live performances I had seen and heard as a (now ex) brass player. In late 2009 the email arrived – 'Congratulations, you've won a prize' – and just as I was about to hit the delete key believing that it was spam, I looked at the email address and saw it was BYU, where I'd sent my application. I couldn't quite believe that I had been awarded the prize and that now I had the opportunity to create a new work for a musician who was a towering figure in the world of music, as well, as I would later find out, one of the loveliest people to work with – much like Christian Jones himself, (perhaps it's a trait of phenomenal trombonists).



A concerto is often a work of conflict and opposition, particularly from the 'Romantic' period onwards. There is, in my opinion, an almost political overtone and drama about the form now; the individual against the masses, making their mark and standing firm for what they believe. *Pandora* (2010, rev. 2022), like *Gresley* (2020) definitely takes the solo trombone and puts them in conflict with the orchestra but also explores the theme of galvanising communion and association between the solo voice and other single or multiple orchestral instruments, to explore the different timbres and colours of the trombone and, dramatically, to put seemingly opposite voices against each other. For example, in *Pandora* one of the main voices of opposition against the solo tenor trombone is the flute, which at times presents the main musical material in a very different setting to how it is taken by the solo trombone.

The other element that was crucial for constructing the work, as with *Gresley*, was having the opportunity to work with Joseph Alessi (and Christian respectively) on what they wanted to express as soloists. Trying to hone the writing of the solo parts for two wonderful exponents of the instrument was a joy and a challenge. Therefore, any other players seeking to perform these works can thank Joseph and Christian for the technical challenges presented in the music – the high, quiet and sustained writing in *Pandora* for example – as these were the very challenges that our soloists wanted to embrace.

Stow Sketches (2015) and *Gresley* (2020) were written against acute personal challenges. The commission from Christian for a standalone trio (*Stow Sketches*) for the section of Opera North draws influence from three scenes of where I was then living – Walthamstow (The Stow), in East London. *Hoe Street Demons* (where there's the hustle, bustle and arrogance of never-ending estate agent offices), *William Morris Nocturne* (inspired by late-night walks in the beautiful gardens of Morris' house which is now Lloyd Park) and *Pound a Bowl* (the vibrant cacophony of the fruit market). The work was written in a matter of days to fulfil the deadline of the commission but the need for me to 'clear the decks' was the passing of my own father at which I was present.

The raw emotion of that time was channelled a little bit in to this piece, perhaps most sincerely in the slow movement of the trio; I think my father would have liked it. Christian offered to delay the premiere but the cathartic process of composing, hearing harmony and escaping the physical world for a brief moment through composing was, I later realised, very important to me. *Gresley* was also written against a difficult backdrop. As a narrative the work is inspired by the incredible story of Sir Nigel Gresley whose wife died of cancer. While dealing with this incredible and acute loss he effectively rebuilt his own human spirit and went on to then design some of the most famous and pioneering steam engines ever, such as *Mallard* and *Flying Scotsman*. This idea of the strength of the human spirit affected me very much, but it felt even more resonant when writing the concerto during the UK Covid Lockdowns during the pandemic.

Windows (2022) was written for the musical team that have recorded it on this album. The work is designed to show little glimpses of some of the themes/characteristics of the trombone section; chorales, jazz and funk and improvisation to name a few examples.



CHRISTIAN JONES: BEHIND THE BIOGRAPHY

Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you are right

HENRY FORD

Counting bars rest in an orchestra gives one plenty of time to plan, and helping to create this album represents the culmination of a lifetime's ambition to record a solo CD. The fact that it has turned into a *sol*i disc with such a wonderful playing and recording team is beyond my wildest expectations, especially having faced the very real prospect of losing the ability to make music.

Invited to tour Latin and South America in September 2014 with my *alma mater*, the Philharmonia Orchestra, I awoke on our travel day from Mexico City to Lima thinking I had slept awkwardly on my left arm. The numb sensation from elbow to fingers continued on the flight to Peru, but wasn't painful: only as I tried to fill in the immigration forms did I realise I could barely grip a pen, let alone write (like many musicians, I'm left handed, and the trombone is held on the left).

The next day we were reunited with our instruments from Customs and I tentatively opened the case: after 24 years of trombone playing, overnight I had become completely unable to hold the instrument to my lips. Leaning my left elbow on the spare trombone stand and rigging up a sling sufficed for the remainder of the tour, after which muscle strength gradually returned as I underwent medical examinations right up to January 2020. I was signed off by my fourth and final NHS Consultant, who indicated that there was no acute diagnosis and I have probable brachial neuritis from years of holding a heavy and asymmetric instrument.

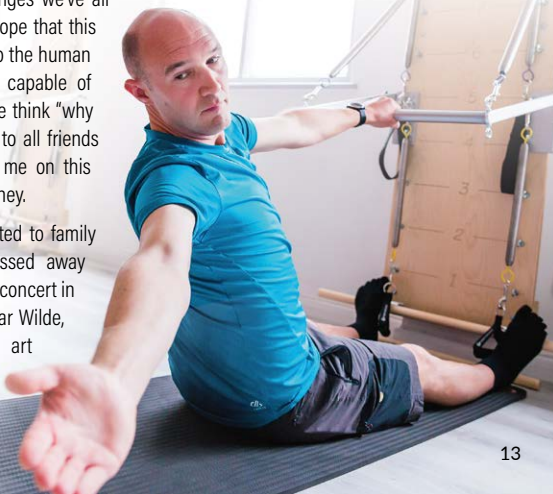
Luckily, my wife and Hallé Orchestra Principal Trombonist Katy Jones had suggested Pilates as a means of developing core strength and I have attended classes each week, without fail, since autumn 2014. Combined with altering my breathing (abdominal release/accent breathing, as

opposed to my previous lateral thoracic method) I haven't actually taken a single day off work with this condition, though the sensation of 'weakness' - not pain - remains constantly in the background.

While I would rather have avoided this whole experience, I feel openness about playing injuries is a positive step in a profession where silence and fear often prevail. Facing the premature end of my career brought creative goals into sharp focus and galvanised a determination to help the bass trombone be more widely accepted as a solo instrument. In this respect, I am particularly indebted to my friend of nearly thirty years, Benjamin Ellin for his consummate artistry - and the willingness of the Opera North management to support both the commissioning of *Gresley* in 2019 and this album three years later. The outstanding contributions from Joseph Alessi, Blair Sinclair and my wonderful Orchestra of Opera North colleagues speak for themselves.

Considering the enormous challenges we've all faced over the past few years, I hope that this album can stand as a testament to the human spirit, proving what everyone is capable of when instead of "why bother?", we think "why not?!". I dedicate my contribution to all friends and family who have supported me on this unpredictable but worthwhile journey.

The *Gresley* première was dedicated to family member Sarah Cardus, who passed away from cancer on the morning of the concert in October 2021: in the words of Oscar Wilde, "life imitates art far more than art imitates life".



ORCHESTRA OF OPERA NORTH

The Orchestra of Opera North holds a unique place amongst British orchestras. Universally praised by audiences and critics alike, it is the only ensemble in the country to have a year-round dual role in the opera house and concert hall.

In addition to the Company's regular opera seasons, the Orchestra plays a significant part in the major concert series of the region, including working with Kirklees Council to curate the Kirklees Concert Season based in Huddersfield and Dewsbury Town Halls. Long-standing relationships with other city institutions see the Orchestra performing regular concerts of major symphonic repertoire, gala concerts and collaborating with the region's choral societies, as well as performing annually alongside pop legends from the 80s and 90s in Leeds Millennium Square. It is the resident orchestra for the Leeds Conductors Competition and plays in Leeds University's International Concert Season.

The Orchestra is committed to nurturing the skills of the musicians of the future through its work with the Education team, including mentoring members of the Opera North Youth Orchestra, a pre-professional ensemble for young instrumentalists at sixth form and university. It also actively connects with new audiences and performs family-friendly and relaxed concerts throughout the year.



MPR006 Windows

Recorded in the Mantle Music Studio, Howard Opera Centre, Opera North, Leeds UK, 22-24th November 2022

Conductor: Benjamin Ellin. Executive Producer: Christian Jones. Producer: Mike Purton. Recording Engineer:

Ben Connellan. Editing: Mike Purton and Ben Connellan. Librarian: Victoria Bellis

Joseph Alessi: Shires custom Alessi model; JA67 solo Lasky mouthpiece

Blair Sinclair: Conn Elkhart 88H; Griego CS5 mouthpiece

Christian Jones: Conn 62HI; Bach 2G mouthpiece

Recorded at 24/96 resolution

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