



# Clarinet & Saxophone

Autumn 2021 Volume 46, No 3

**Howells Sonata**  
A NEW DISCOVERY

**Music courses**  
LEARNING AND BELONGING

**Historical Fiction**  
CHRISTIAN FORSHAW'S  
LATEST ALBUM

**Bach Invention No 8**  
FREE MIXED SAX DUET

The viral virtuoso

**NICOLAS BALDEYROU**

**PLUS:** KATIA BEAUGAIS | TEACHING TONGUING | GEAR, CD & SHEET MUSIC REVIEWS  
NEWS | LETTERS | PHILIP GREENE TRIBUTE | DIARY: CONCERTS & COURSES

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## Jess Gillam awarded MBE

23-year-old saxophonist Jess Gillam has been awarded an MBE in the 2021 Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to music. Commenting on the award, Gillam said: 'I feel extremely touched to receive this award, especially in a year where so many people have done such incredible and selfless things. It's very unexpected and a complete surprise – I'm very grateful to all of those who have supported me and to have had the opportunity to learn an instrument in the first place. Music has changed my life and I'm passionate about sharing its magic with other people!'

Since becoming the first saxophonist to reach the BBC Young Musician of the Year grand final in 2016, Gillam has rapidly become one of the most recognisable faces on the UK's classical music scene. Hailing from Ulverston, Cumbria, she was the first saxophonist to be signed to Decca Classics, and her debut album, *RISE*, and her recent second album, *TIME*, both shot straight to No 1 in the official UK classical charts. In addition to concert performances, which have included televised appearances at the Last Night of the Proms and the BAFTA awards, Gillam is also in demand as a broadcaster on TV and radio, currently presenting her own weekly show, *This Classical Life*, on BBC Radio 3. She is a Vandoren UK artist and became the youngest ever endorsee for Yanagisawa Saxophones aged just 13.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBIN CLEWLEY



## UB40 saxophonist dies at 62

Brian Travers, saxophone player and songwriter of the UK reggae band UB40, has died aged 62. A statement from the band said he passed away at home following 'a long and heroic battle with cancer'. His last performance with the group was at a concert in December 2019 held at the Arena Birmingham.

Travers formed UB40 in 1978 with musicians from various schools across Birmingham, choosing their name as a reference to a form issued to people claiming unemployment benefits at the time. With a total of 39 UK top 40 songs and 100m albums sold worldwide, the group's hits included *Red Red Wine*, *I Got You Babe*, *One in Ten* and *(I Can't Help) Falling in Love With You*.

## Single-reed memorabilia goes under the hammer



Arlan Ettinger of Guernsey's auction house inspects a saxophone played by Bill Clinton at his 1993 inaugural ball

A saxophone played by Bill Clinton and a Selmer B flat clarinet owned by Benny Goodman were among the items recently sold at 'A Century of Music', an online auction hosted by Guernsey's in New York. Items under the hammer included a range of memorabilia from emblematic 20th-century musical events and artists, such as the Woodstock Festival, the Beatles, Van Halen, and Lynyrd Skynyrd.

Bill Clinton's Armstrong saxophone was one of two played by the former President during his inaugural ball in

1993. The instrument is signed by Clinton himself as well as approximately 12 celebrity attendees, including Michael Jackson, Jack Nicholson, Mick Fleetwood, Christine McVie, Macaulay Culkin and Stevie Nicks. McVie wrote the words 'Don't Stop!', a clear reference to the Clinton presidential campaign's Fleetwood Mac theme song of the same name. The instrument sold for \$13,000 at auction, which was noticeably lower than the estimate of \$30,000 to \$40,000.

Benny Goodman's Selmer B flat clarinet sold for \$24,000, in line with the estimate of \$20,000 to \$30,000. The series 10G instrument, manufactured in 1974, came directly from Goodman's family and was sold in its original case – there were also three boxes of reeds inside, assumingly used or selected by Goodman himself!

## New ABRSM woodwind syllabus

The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) has launched its new woodwind syllabus valid for use in Practical and Performance Grades from 1 January 2022. A one-year overlap period comes into effect on the same date, meaning candidates can present pieces from the 2018–2021 syllabus in exams until the end of 2022.

Here are the key headlines:

- A duet option is included in Practical Grades for the first time up to Grade 3.
- Solo/unaccompanied repertoire is now included on A and B lists, while some C pieces are now accompanied. Candidates are no longer required to play a solo piece in the exam, but they may play up to two solo pieces.
- The new syllabus features 18 new commissions and more than 70 works written or arranged by composers from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds – a tenfold increase on the previous syllabus. The new edition also features 220 pieces by female composers.
- For Practical Grades, there are no changes to scales and arpeggios, sight-reading and aural test requirements from the previous syllabus.

# Nicolas Baldeyrou

*Mixing humour and virtuosity, the multi-tracked videos of French clarinettist Nicolas Baldeyrou have brought him widespread attention and acclaim. He talks to Toby Deller about his viral arrangements, musical education and perspectives on performing and teaching*

'Holidays are over, it's time to practise,' begins the cheerful caption under the first video on Nicolas Baldeyrou's YouTube channel. The clip, posted in September 2019, shows him despatching the last of Klosé's 14 Études on a Buffet Légende boxwood clarinet. More were to follow, often multi-tracked videos made using Final Cut Pro. By the end of the year, dressed in multiple Christmas jumpers and Santa deely boppers, he was taking it to another level of entertainment, his multi-clarinet jazz rendition of Jingle Bells more tightly knit than the actual knitwear.

A few months later, it was not only the holidays that seemed to be over. Baldeyrou continued his home videos throughout the pandemic lockdowns in France. He is generous in response to viewers who have commented on the dozens of videos (his channel has around 30,000 subscribers, while the clips themselves have had over three million views). More than prepared to clown around, he even provided his own backing vocals for a second Christmas spectacular (Mariah Carey's *All I Want For Christmas Is You*). And he has involved other musicians too, such as his students from the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et Danse (CNSMD) in Lyon, where he has been teaching since 2006, who contributed to a couple of showpiece arrangements.

Born in 1972, Baldeyrou began his own musical journey just to the south of Paris in the local conservatoires of the district where he grew up, the kind of establishments which, rather than schools, are responsible for the majority of children's music education in France. He had outgrown them by his early teens, however, progressing ahead of time to the Paris Conservatoire (CNSM), where he studied with Michel Arrignon, Jérôme-Julien Laferrière, and bass clarinet with Jean-Noël Crocq.

He subsequently won three major international competitions: the ARD in Germany, Dos Hermanas in Spain and ICA Young Artist in the USA. He also embarked on a series of principal clarinet posts, beginning with the European Union Youth Orchestra and culminating in 2011 in his current job at the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. Away from the orchestra, he has performed widely as a recitalist and has averaged more or less a recording per year for various labels since his first featured release in 2002.

A large proportion of these are of modern and contemporary works – although more in the mould of Elliott Carter, Kaija Saariaho and Baldeyrou's compatriot Eric Tanguy than Mariah Carey. Indeed, his most recent album, *Dialogues*, focuses on Pierre Boulez and was reviewed glowingly in the spring 2021 issue of *Clarinet & Saxophone*. Even that reviewer, however, couldn't help but refer admiringly to Baldeyrou's videos, so it is with them I begin my interview with the musician he also dubbed an 'official musical phenomenon'.





# Historical Fiction

A new disc from saxophonist Christian Forshaw and soprano Grace Davidson presents baroque arrangements alongside recomposed fragments of the same material. Stephanie Reeve hears from them both about creating a fresh musical narrative



Christian Forshaw and Grace Davidson

When soprano Grace Davidson attended a recording session in 2007, she could scarcely have imagined she would be featured in the pages of *Clarinet & Saxophone* almost 15 years later, standing alongside saxophonist Christian Forshaw. Davidson was invited to record as part of the vocal ensemble for Forshaw's second album, *Renouncement*, when the singer due to sing the solo vocal parts became unwell. Davidson stood in, her first time performing with a saxophonist, and here we are today – *Historical Fiction*, the pair's fourth album working together.

Forshaw garnered global attention after the release of his debut album *Sanctuary* in 2004, which combined saxophone, voices, church organ and percussion in arrangements of sacred melodies and original compositions. The disc explored the ecclesiastical sound world he'd grown up with as a boy chorister in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, and received exceptional airplay worldwide, peaking at No 1 in the classical charts. Following the success of the album, the saxophonist turned down a four-album deal with Sony BMG in favour of setting up his own label, Integra Records UK, to ensure his own creative freedom in future projects. Alongside his eclectic career as a performer and composer (most recently having music featured in Ridley Scott's film *The Last Duel* for 20th Century Fox), he has taught at his alma mater, the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, since 2002.

Soprano Grace Davidson also studied in London, at the Royal Academy of Music, where she won the Early Music Prize. Since then, she has worked as a soloist with leading Baroque ensembles under the likes of Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Paul McCreesh, Philippe Herreweghe and Harry Christophers. Her pure vocal qualities also attract the attention of contemporary composers, both for concert performances as well as soundtracks for film, TV and video. Notably, she was the solo (and only) vocalist to feature in Max Richter's *Sleep* – a landmark eight-and-a-half-hour work recorded in 2015 exploring new ways for music and consciousness to interact.

However, by her own admission, Davidson is first and foremost a Baroque specialist, aptly showcased in her latest collaboration with Forshaw, *Historical Fiction*. Speaking over Zoom, this forms the topic of my conversation with both performers today.

# gear

## GEAR REVIEWS

### THE SAXSEAT

c.£300

When I was asked to review a new seat for playing the saxophone that cost around £300, my initial reaction was to question what was wrong with every other chair that I'd sat on to play the saxophone for the best part of 20 years. I was reminded, however, of the first saxophone course I went on with Rob Buckland. For some reason, it stuck in my mind that Rob brought his own stool with him for the course; at the time I thought this was somewhat poncy, but more than a decade on I now fully understand his decision.

You don't have to look far to find a saxophonist that has suffered from back, shoulder, neck or arm pain at some point in their life. There can be a multitude of causes for this, but I expect that if we all took a step back and considered our playing position, we would be able to identify and even rectify many of these causes.

Enter The SaxSeat – a fully adjustable stool with a removable backrest and a (patented) adjustable instrument arm. The real innovation of The SaxSeat is the adjustable instrument arm, designed to support the weight of the saxophone. When playing, the instrument is fully supported by the instrument arm, taking all the weight away from a player's neck, back and shoulders. My first thought was that this was probably little more than a gimmick; however, when adjusted correctly it is surprisingly comfortable and does indeed remove all the weight of the instrument. After playing baritone on The SaxSeat for just a few minutes, I was surprised at how heavy the baritone felt when I returned to playing it without the seat. I was also pleasantly surprised that it did not feel restrictive at all in terms of being able to move while playing. There was just the right amount of motion in both the seat and the instrument arm so the instrument feels secure but still allows you to move. Another opportunity The SaxSeat allows is for larger instruments to be played directly in front of the player rather than to the side, a position I actually found much more comfortable on both tenor and baritone.

Not content with trying The SaxSeat in the comfort of our homes, Gerard McChrystal and I decided to put it to the test at our Summer Saxes Course at Benslow Music, where we tested the seat further, as well as giving students on the course the chance to try it out. We were very fortunate that Kostas Efesopoulos, the designer of The SaxSeat, kindly spoke to us about it via Zoom as well as telling us how to adjust it optimally. Kostas also told us a little of the story behind the seat, which he designed in response to wanting to play the saxophone without putting any excess strain on his body and to be able to continue to play pain-free as he entered middle age and beyond. It was also useful to learn that the demonstration seat we had been sent was a prototype and not the finished version that would be shipped. This put my mind at rest a little, as we had received the seat with no instructions, and it took a little while to work out how to assemble it correctly! A few of the joints also had a little more play in them than I would have ideally liked; however, the finished product has had a few updates, so I don't think this should be a major issue.

One final and perhaps unexpected discovery of The SaxSeat is that using it does change the sound of the instrument. This is due to some of the vibrations of the instrument being absorbed by the seat, causing the sound to be slightly muffled. While the change is not huge, it is enough to be



The SaxSeat

The real innovation of The SaxSeat is the adjustable instrument arm, designed to support the weight of the saxophone

noticeable, especially when playing soprano, since the end of the soprano is partially covered by the instrument holder. As Gerard demonstrated, you'll also struggle to get the adjustment high enough for a soprano. Not a problem for most people...

Interestingly, the response from students on the course was quite polarised; some shared my initial reaction that it is rather a lot to pay for a seat, while others thought it was a bargain to be able to play the sax for longer and reduce the strain on their bodies. Could an investment now save you hundreds of pounds of osteopath appointments in the future? Quite possibly.

However good a product The SaxSeat is, one of the most important things is how it is set up. Owning The SaxSeat alone is not enough to improve your posture. It would be quite easy, for example, to set it with the instrument attachment in too low a position, meaning that you are constantly leaning forward to the instrument or bending down to it; a sure-fire way of getting back pain. For that reason, if you do decide to invest in The SaxSeat, I would highly recommend asking a teacher or colleague to help you set it up, ensuring that it is in the optimum position so the