A photograph of a tree's silhouette against a bright, golden sunset sky. The tree's branches and leaves are dark against the glowing background. The sky transitions from a pale yellow at the top to a deeper orange near the horizon. The bottom of the image shows a dark silhouette of a forest or hills.

20th Century British Piano Music, vol. 3

Michael TIPPETT Sonata no. 4  
Robert SAXTON Sonata  
Colin MATTHEWS 11 Studies in Velocity  
Constant LAMBERT Elegy

Nicholas UNWIN  
piano

## Metier 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Piano Music Series, vol. 3

### Sir Michael Tippett (1905-1998)

	<b>Piano Sonata no. 4</b>	<b>34.50</b>
1	<i>Medium Slow</i>	5.55
2	<i>Medium Fast</i>	4.02
3	<i>Slow</i>	7.52
4	<i>Fast</i>	7.14
5	<i>Slow</i>	9.47

### Robert Saxton (b. 1953)

6	<b>Piano Sonata in one movement</b>	<b>10.59</b>
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### Colin Matthews (b. 1946)

	<b>11 Studies in Velocity</b>	<b>12.08</b>
7	No. 5 <i>Energico</i>	0.56
8	No. 7 <i>Allegro fantastico</i>	1.19
9	No. 3 <i>Con fuoco, quasi recitativo</i>	1.11
10	No. 8 <i>Agitato</i>	1.04
11	No. 1 <i>Quasi improvvisando</i>	0.35
12	No. 6 <i>Tumultuoso</i>	1.07
13	No. 2 <i>Leggiero e ritmico</i>	0.44
14	No. 4 <i>Allegro leggiero</i>	0.49
15	No. 9 <i>Volando</i>	0.58
16	No. 10 <i>Tempo giusto, sostenuto</i>	1.26
17	No. 11 <i>Allegro drammatico</i>	1.59

### Constant Lambert (1905-1951)

18	<b>Elegy <i>Lento molto</i></b>	<b>4.32</b>
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**Nicholas Unwin – piano**

**Total CD duration 62.34**

## Tippett – Piano Sonata No. 4 (1984)

When in late 1983 he began his Fourth Piano Sonata, Michael Tippett had in mind a counterpart to Beethoven's set of Six Bagatelles, Op. 126. But the composition grew into a fully fledged sonata, laid out in five spacious movements. The work was commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association in celebration of the composer's 80th birthday and, at the première on January 14 1985, the pianist was Paul Crossley.

Tippett has observed that in five-movement works – more common in the quartet than the sonata repertoire – the central (third) movement tends to be forced into prominence, producing a peak of expressive intensity or display. And, in fact, we reach the expressive core of this sonata in the third movement. Partly under the influence of late Beethoven, but also because of his own current preoccupations (Tippett had only a year earlier completed his largest scale concert work, *The Mask of Time*), the sonata seems to cover a gamut of experience. Not for nothing, then, does the third movement grow from the opening 'birth image' of Tippett's Fourth Symphony, quoted subsequently in *The Mask of Time*, but here developed in an entirely new direction. Moreover, this slow movement is like a microcosm of the whole work, for it too has a five-section format, which the composer describes as 'A-B(1/2)-C-B(1/2)-A'.

The sonata opens with a kind of prelude, which flows through a sequence of ideas until it reaches a reflective choral motif full of bluesy major/minor clashes. The first of these harmonic clashes – centered on the tonality of D – provides for not only this movement but the finale, a theme with four (generally slow) variations with their ultimate uneasy point of rest.

The second movement is a fugue and the fourth a fast scherzo making great play with rhythmically disjunct writing for the pianist's hands.

When writing the work, Tippett constantly took advice from Paul Crossley, and as a result introduced into his sonata a variety of colours and textures – especially those produced by means of the middle pedal – hitherto unexplored in his piano music. Like many of the compositions of Tippett's last two decades, the sonata is a synthesis of ideas and techniques, both retrospective and exploratory, manifesting both his maturity and mastery.

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### **Robert Saxton on the music of Sir Michael Tippett**

Sir Michael Tippett's music affected me deeply when I was in my mid-teens, and it is true to say, I think, that most creative artists have stored in their memory-bank work by others which has a particular significance for them. This 'special place' goes far beyond superficialities of style or manner, or a naïve desire to imitate the model.

What occurs is this: during the course of development towards one's creative goals, certain figures (both in terms of personality and work) 'resonate' in sympathy with areas which the painter, poet, composer, sculptor senses as, somehow, being part of a world which is already inherently present; the sympathetic or 'external' figure therefore becomes at once a refracted mirror-image, the objective projection of

one's own subjective aims and aspirations. This encompasses more than individual works, and Tippett himself clearly has the same relationship as just outlined with, say, Gibbons and Beethoven. The source acts as catalyst.

I had a similar experience with Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage*, *Second String Quartet*, *The Heart's Assurance*, *Boyhood's End* and, above all, *The Vision of Saint Augustine*. The Second Quartet was an examination set work when I was at school, and I can still recapture at will the sense of ecstasy which I felt on hearing and studying this music over a quarter of a century ago. I use the word 'studying' on purpose, because the technical mastery of, say, the first movement enhanced my appreciation and love of the whole. With regard to all these pieces I was inspired by their sounds and sensibilities.

The piano sonatas, spanning the decades, share the qualities outlined and encapsulate the essentials of Tippett's rich art at each stage of his career. His energy and inventiveness, combined with a healthy respect for tradition and a profound awareness of how the past can be used creatively in the present, is his greatest triumph as an artist. The lack of system and dogma, so frequently misunderstood, turns out, in retrospect, to be a continuation of the British empirical tradition which encompasses Shakespeare, Purcell, the philosophers Locke and Hume and visionaries such as Blake, Turner and Francis Bacon.

I wish Sir Michael peace and fulfilment in the year of his ninetieth birthday.

Robert Saxton, March 1995

## Saxton – Piano Sonata (1981)

Often incorporating elements of the one-movement fantasia while acting as a laboratory for the interaction of keyboard idioms and harmonic forms, the 20th-century piano sonata offers classics by Berg, Bartók, Bridge, Boulez and Tippett as inspiration for today's composers, who have responded to their example with works of experiment as much as imitation.

And so it is with Robert Saxton's Piano Sonata, first performed by Renée Reznik at the 1981 Cambridge Summer Music Festival. A work that shows a sensitive awareness of its peers and predecessors, in substance it nonetheless embodies the structural processes of evolving harmony and melody that are also the personal hallmark of such contrasting Saxton scores as the *Chamber Symphony: The Circles of Light* (1986), and the recent *Ring-Time* (1995) for symphonic wind.

Musically, the issue revolves around the keystone interval of the tritone, heard alone or in consort with a cluster of related pitches, notably those involving a rocking major second. How these shapes are amplified both horizontally and vertically into monody, quicksilver arpeggios or slowly unfolding cantus is part of the bracing plot of music.

Expressively, the mood by turns matches soothing concord with formidable brilliance, but always to the purpose of sweeping the growing tension through many sections, like a single extended upbeat, to the final chorale in memory of Bela Bartók. Three times this chimes, in a scansion of 4, 6 and 8 chords respectively, bringing to a close one of the

most rounded and exuberant of recent British contributions to this challenging genre.

## **Matthews – 11 Studies in Velocity (1987)**

Composer-pianists write studies concerned with aspects of piano technique, but Colin Matthews, a composer whose large-scale works such as *Hidden Variables* (1989) and *Contraflow* (1992) have been especially concerned with the varying rates at which music traverses its own ground, typically writes studies in velocity.

His pianism is hard and virtuosic. Whereas the Saxton Sonata explores refined nuances of piano resonance, Matthews revels in the instrument's percussive character. The brutal thrust of the music is embodied in a torrent of notes whose dynamic profile, now additive with unequal groups of notes, now pulsating with the vibrant clash of cross-rhythms, constantly extends the illusion of music at high speed, pursued throughout the instrument's seven-octave register.

A composer influenced by aleatoricism and minimalism as well as serialism, Matthews introduces performer choice as a basic element in the work's construction. The studies can be set in any order around a slow Nocturne placed near the end, and must conclude with a gripping Toccata-etude in which surging currents of repeated notes conflict with throbbing inner voices in the manner of Steve Reich.

In the present version an arresting opening of muscular syncopation is followed by a judicious mix of scherzandi and heavyweight episodes, each brief section, whatever the chosen sequence, skillfully written to lead to the next so that unity of tone and effect is imposed on a kaleidoscopic diversity. Commissioned by the Finzi Trust with funds from Southern Arts, the *Eleven Studies in Velocity* were first performed by William Howard at the Wigmore Hall in October 1987.

## Lambert – Elegy (1938)

Constant Lambert was the first 20th-century British composer to define a home-grown yet cosmopolitan piano style in his three early works: *The Rio Grande*, the Piano Sonata, and the *Elegiac Blues*. They are achievements of unqualified brilliance; yet despite their Parisian wit and jazz uplift, they contain moments of melancholy and despair that seem all too prescient of the subsequent tragedy that was Lambert's career.

The brief piano *Elegy*, a later work dedicated to Harriet Cohen, also captures something of his complex nature - the side that grieved deeply over the death of Peter Warlock, and which could set as a magnum opus that Elizabethan masque of darkness, Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. Two brief episodes sharing the warmth of major tonalities are stalked by a twisting, semitonal phrase that denies any final respite until the quietly enigmatic ending of atmospheric piano chords.



**Nicholas Unwin** was born in Cambridge in 1962. He studied the piano with John Barstow at the Royal College of Music in London and later with Philip Fowke. Whilst at the RCM, he won the prestigious Chappell Gold Medal and Cyril Smith Prize, and on leaving, received an award from the Countess of Munster Musical Trust and a silver medal from the Worshipful Company of Musicians.

Early in 1986 he launched his professional career to much critical acclaim with two Purcell Room recitals (including one for the Park Lane Group) and a performance of Bartók's Second Piano Concerto which was later broadcast on BBC Radio Three.

During the next few years he won numerous other awards and gave recitals in such places as the Wigmore Hall, Birmingham University and Leeds Town Hall, also recording his first recital for BBC Radio. In 1989 he became artist in residence at the King's Lynn Festival, playing concertos by De Falla and Ravel with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and in subsequent years performing Barber's Concerto with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under Andrew Litton. His recital of Spanish and Latin-American music won a standing ovation during the 1991 Festival.

His many concerto appearances have included Tchaikovsky's First with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Adrian Leaper, Rachmaninov's Second at both the Barbican and the Royal Festival Hall, and Shostakovich's Second. His recital appearances have taken him all over the UK, including Lichfield Festival, Cambridge, Bradford, Colchester, Barnstaple, Tunbridge Wells, London, and the Sheffield Chamber Music Festival.

His connections with Sir Michael Tippett are strong. He took part in a BBC TV documentary about the composer, shown in September 1991, he accompanied the composer to Madrid where he gave a highly acclaimed recital, and in 1994 he took part in a 'live' Radio France broadcast with Sir Michael, performing the second and fourth sonatas. Later that year he toured Tippett's Piano Concerto with the Northern Junior Philharmonic Orchestra. Tippett's 90th birthday celebrations in 1995 led to many performances including the Barbican 'Visions of Paradise' Festival and the Tippett Conference in Newcastle.

At the end of 1999 he moved to Tokyo where he spent just over 4 stimulating years immersing himself in Japanese culture and language, a hobby which he has continued since returning to the UK in 2004. In 2005, he discovered a new-found passion for jazz and popular music and has since then devoted himself to this genre.



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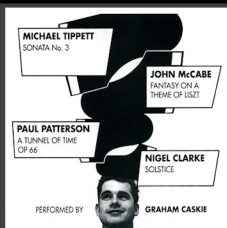
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