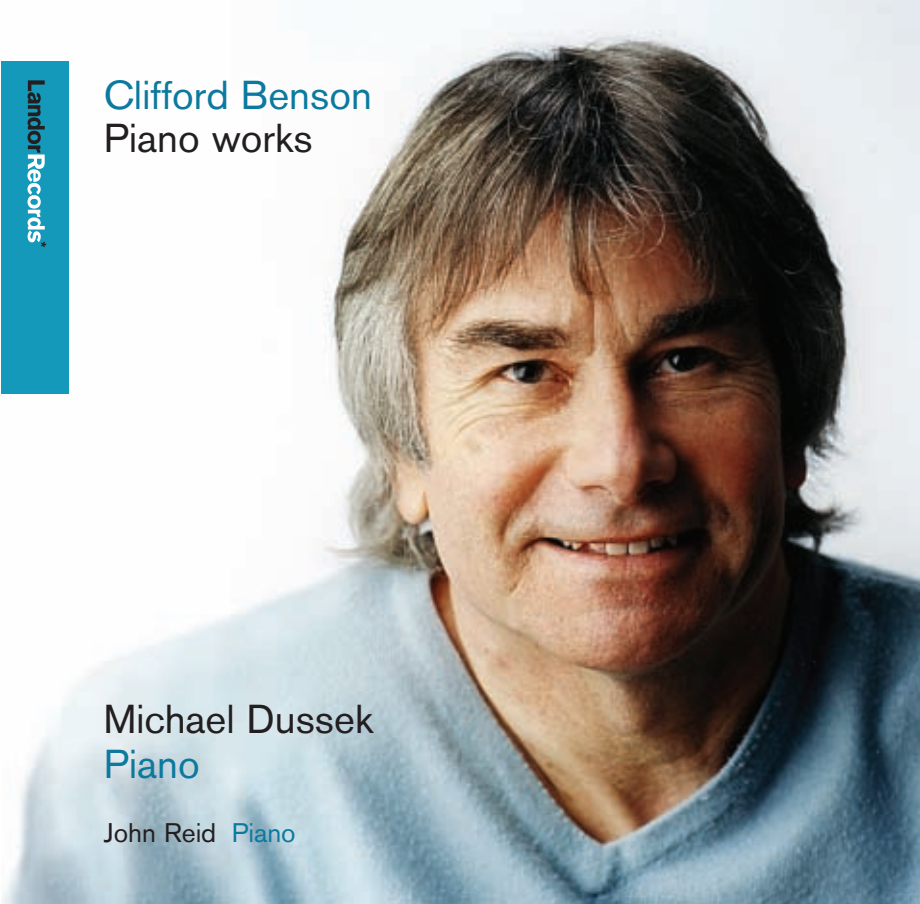


Clifford Benson
Piano works

Michael Dussek
Piano

John Reid Piano



Clifford Benson

(1946–2007)



Michael Dussek
Piano



John Reid
Piano



Michael Dussek Piano
John Reid Piano (track 19)

Clifford Benson

Piano works

Six Pieces

1	Romance d'amour	1.48
2	Humoresque	2.20
3	Au revoir, Sylvie	1.46
4	Consolation	3.22
5	Petite Burlesque	1.31
6	Arabesque	1.29

7-15	Variations on Frère Jacques	4.20
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Three Pieces

16	Rondo	2.05
17	Spanish Dance	1.24
18	Little March	2.56

19	Mozart Goes To Town (for piano duet)	6.04
20	Réflexions	3.47

Variations on Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

21	Petite Prélude - Debussy	0.26
22	Tema	0.17
23	Variation 1: Overture – Rossini	0.19
24	Variation 2: Rhapsody	0.32
25	Variation 3: Intermezzo	0.28
26	Variation 4: Cantus Firmus No.1	0.39
27	Variation 5: March – Prokofiev	0.32
28	Variation 6: Romance – Elgar	0.36
29	Variation 7: Scherzetto	0.24
30	Variation 8: Scherzino	0.37
31	Variation 9: Cantus Firmus No.2	0.40
32	Variation 10: Valse – Chopin (with a little help from Beethoven)	0.47
33	Variation 11: Canon	0.16
34	Variation 12: Tango	1.36
35	Variation 13: Rag – Scott Joplin	0.55
36	Variation 14: Frère Jacques	0.44
37	Variation 15: Rondo – Mozart	0.43
38	Variation 16: Waltz – Brahms	1.05
39	Variation 17: Swingle (with a short and bitter 'suite' introduction from J S Bach)	1.00
40	Variation 18: Finale	2.08

Total length

47.46

I never met Clifford Benson, but like many avid collectors of recordings of the last 25 years his was a name well known to me as a chamber player and accompanist. That he was a composer too was something I did not find out until too late - and the loss was clearly mine.

You can tell a lot from obituaries, not just the facts of someone's life, but also the colour and weave of it. Sometimes obituarists go into contortions trying to find tactful things to say about people who were clearly deeply flawed in their lives. No such difficulties arose in this case. All the reports of his tragically early death speak of Clifford Benson's humanity, generosity and concern for others, whether as a teacher, a professional colleague or as a member of the communities in which he lived. It is clear that the many with whom he came into contact considered themselves to have been exceptionally lucky.

But you do not need the obituary columns to know this. The evidence is in the works on this CD. They exude a colourful mix of emotion, fun and deep knowledge of musical

heritage and contain some wonderful music which will be heard by many listeners for the first time. That he was ultimately too ill to perform it on the recording cheats us all of something special, but that he was able to supervise the recording by respected friends (and I include in that the production team) means that it captures the essence of him and still stands as an important testament to a much-missed member of the English musical scene.

I am honoured that his family have entrusted Landor with this recording and we are privileged and delighted to be able to allow others to share in his music.

Guy Harvey - Chairman, Landor Records

The story behind the CD

by Dilys Benson

Around Clifford's busy schedule, composing rather took a back seat, but it was a long-held ambition of his to finalise his piano compositions and make a CD recording of them; his 60th birthday year seemed the ideal opportunity to celebrate and bring the project to fruition. Discovering that Jeremy Hayes had taken over Potton Hall clinched the matter and the recording was booked for February 2007, with Jeremy producing and Tony Faulkner as sound engineer - "the A Team", as Clifford said - he had worked with them both before and was very excited.

In October 2006, we went to Potton Hall to try the pianos and talk through the recording with Jeremy - it was a beautiful, idyllic autumn day and the countryside looked wonderful. Thinking back, I remember that Clifford seemed a little unsettled and to be struggling with some passages he would not normally think twice about, but I thought little of it at the time. Early in November, he was due to play at Tonbridge Music Club in a concert 'Clifford Benson and Friends'. The concert was a celebration for the life of the previous President, Arnold Cooke, who had died the

year before, and to welcome Clifford as the new President. The Monday before the concert, Clifford phoned me from the Royal Academy of Music, where he was rehearsing, to say he would have to cancel - this was unheard of and I knew it must be serious.

Following tests, early in December Clifford was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour; the loss of use in his right hand and arm had been the first indication. He was determined, however, that the CD recording should proceed and he asked his friend and colleague, Michael Dussek, if he would take it on. Michael agreed, even without seeing the music - knowing Clifford, he said, he was sure that he would not have written anything horrid! He also had a talented ex-pupil, John Reid, who would be perfect for Mozart Goes To Town. The one worry was that Michael could not do anything until March and we were concerned that Clifford might not make it that far.

Throughout December and January, alongside radiotherapy treatment, Clifford worked obsessively to perfect his beautiful,

hand-written manuscripts. He'd always composed at the keyboard and now this was difficult, so he co-opted his daughters Sarah and Emily and me to play the right hand for him and to amend the manuscripts. His determination was awesome and some days he completely wore us out!

The days prior to the recording were an anxious time; Clifford was very poorly and I thought he wouldn't be able to make it to Potton Hall - but, again, the Benson determination came through. Clifford was, to quote Michael, "physically frail, but mentally scarily on the ball!" and we had two wonderful days' recording. Clifford was so happy with the results.

So, Sarah, Emily and I cannot thank the team enough - Michael, John, Jeremy and Tony, and not forgetting Helen for the wonderful hospitality. And a big thank you too to Landor for sharing our excitement in this wonderful music. As Clifford himself said, "I think it's a bloody good CD!"

[Dilys Benson, January 2008](#)

The Pieces

Clifford began composing quite early on, as soon as he could play anything reasonably well on the piano. Consequently he always composed at the keyboard, which could also explain why he improvised so well. (On one occasion, in a Nash Ensemble concert in Spain, he found that the last page of his music, which involved a florid piano cadenza, was missing and he improvised while the poor page-turner went off stage to retrieve it. It was a matter of principle never to stop - but he got a buzz out of the challenge!) These solo piano pieces were composed in phases over a lifetime, around his other music-making activities. Someone would make a suggestion, or an idea would come into his head out of nowhere, and he'd be off - and then there was no stopping him. He found it very difficult to let go and finish a piece, because he kept getting ideas; sometimes he'd spend hours and hours going over a few bars, only to get up the next day and decide his original idea was best. In his endeavour to make his intentions clear, he was obsessive about markings - phrasing, pedalling, expression, tempo etc - which is evident from his manuscripts. Shorter pieces seemed to

appeal to him more, but he also composed some longer sets of variations on popular themes. Frère Jacques was his own idea and, after he'd played it at a summer school, someone suggested that he tackle Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, which he did with relish. Although the pieces are frequently witty and graced by a wonderful simplicity, they are always imbued by Clifford's true seriousness about music, his harmonic instinct and the care for every note so evident in his own playing.

Apart from the solo piano works, he also wrote for flute and piano (A Song for Wibb, written for William Bennett for his 50th birthday), oboe and piano (Tango Variations, written for Jo Roberts for her 18th birthday, premièred by Nicholas Daniel and Julius Drake in Portsmouth, and now published in a flute and piano transcription by Pan Educational Music), a few songs, and sketchings for a children's opera. Although "not exactly prolific", as he himself said, every piece is a gem.

Six Pieces: this evocative set of pieces was composed between 1956 and 1983. Nos. 2, 3 and 4 were considerably revised from September 2000 to July 2002 and *Réflexions*, originally part of the set, was replaced by the *Arabesque* in 2006. Clifford originally conceived the pieces as a *Suite Romantique*, but thought in the end they were more likely to be performed individually as encores; he liked them in this order and thought that is how they should be recorded.

Romance d'amour: this tender, romantic piece was written for Dilys.

Humoresque: dedicated to flautist Trevor Wye; Clifford really enjoyed Trevor's quirky sense of humour.

Au revoir, Sylvie: Sylvie stayed with the family for a year in 1981, whilst studying English and working as a French Assistante. Everyone loved Sylvie and when she left, Clifford thought that this tune, rather wistful and a little French in flavour, was appropriate for the occasion. It was orchestrated and played by the BBC Concert Orchestra at

one of their Gala Concerts on Radio 2.

Consolation: inspired by Liszt's well-known piano *Consolations*, this piece, largely soothing in character, was written for his mother, Doris.

Petite Burlesque: this piece is just a bit of fun, written early on, and dedicated to his father, George. Initially he called it *The Budgerigar* and it was quite simple, but he revisited it to make it wittier.

Arabesque: this was written much later, to complete the set - another lovely tune, dedicated to his sister, Sylvia.

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Variations on Frère Jacques: (Dedicated to Thea King) Clifford suddenly thought he'd like to try his hand at some variations and plumped for *Frère Jacques*. Originally conceived in 1966, the variations were substantially revised in 2001 – 2002 when he changed the ending to make it more exciting. The second variation was inspired by the flautist Alexa Turpin.

Three Pieces: George Malcolm encouraged Clifford to approach Novello with these pieces and they were published in 1983. He made a few amendments later and also changed the order.

Rondo: (Dedicated to his daughter, Sarah) Clifford always "liked a bit of counterpoint" and here simply tried to experiment with an atonal piece, which is why it's in two keys; he didn't get very far and quickly had to resort to diatonic music, so each of the episodes is diatonic, culminating in the final section being atonal again. It was "simply an exercise in counterpoint, probably not very adventurous, but it works!"

Spanish Dance: (Dedicated to his daughter, Emily) Clifford wanted to compose a decent piece to take to Herbert Howells - he'd taken something along to a lesson and Howells hadn't been very enthusiastic about it; so he went back the next week with the *Spanish Dance* and Howells said, "Oh, that's better than the one you brought me last time - that's a lot more like it!"

Little March: (Dedicated to his wife, Dilys) This was probably Clifford's favourite of all his pieces. He liked the ostinato march-like theme, which is set firstly with one lot of counterpoint, and then two; a simple, wistful little theme going along on the top, with embellishment around it. Again, he "didn't know where it came from - I just suddenly thought of it"

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Mozart Goes To Town: (Dedicated to George Malcolm) George asked Clifford to compose a piece that John Amis had initially asked him to write for a Mozart celebration concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, along the lines of Alec Templeton's *Bach Goes To Town*. George didn't feel he could do it, and neither did Clifford want to write a similar piece, but he was enthused by the idea of writing something incorporating Mozart's themes in a more jazzy style. He was quite offended when someone called it a 'medley', as the piece has a form and the tunes run through it and develop. You can guess most of the themes, but the one at the end is the Mozart *Alleluia* (which carries on

longer than most people think) and not Haydn. This final recorded version is quite different, and more difficult, than the original (published by Allans), and is much more exciting!

References are made to the following works (some are more audible than others!):

Piano Sonata in C, K.545
Piano Concerto in C minor, K.491
Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K.550
Overture to The Marriage of Figaro, K.492
Rondo alla Turca from Piano Sonata in A, K.331
Piano Concerto in C major, K.467 (2nd movement) leading to Puppet on a String
Eine kleine Nachtmusik, K.525
Piano Concerto in D minor, K.466
Alleluia from Exsultate Jubilate, K.165
Trio: Soave sia il vento, from *Così fan tutte*, K.588
Symphony No. 41 (Jupiter), K.551
Flute Concerto in G major, K.313

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Réflexions: (Dedicated to Levon Chilingirian) Clifford wrote to Michael, "Réflexions is a piece that stands on its own and is very indicative of my weird sense of humour and passion!" He showed this piece to Levon when he was in the middle of composing it and Levon played it on the violin, hamming up the first theme, with lots of rubato and

double stopping. They always enjoyed pulling each other's leg - so this piece had to be dedicated to Levon.

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18 Variations on Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star: (Dedicated to his grandson, Alexander Joseph) Clifford never set out with the intention that some of the variations of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star would be pastiches of other composers and he was never really sure why that happened - he started and the allusions "just evolved, as part of the development of the whole work". His feeling was that "the composer element was almost incidental in a way - it was all 'me' really". As the idea for the piece had come from a performance of Frère Jacques, he couldn't resist including it in some way, though it never appears in its entirety. There is an alternative, simplified Variation 18; Michael, however, plays the hard one - Clifford never told him until afterwards there was an easier version, and Michael said he wouldn't have played that one anyway!

Introduction – Petite Prélude - Debussy

Tema

Variations:

- Variation 1: Overture - Rossini
- Variation 2: Rhapsody
- Variation 3: Intermezzo
- Variation 4: Cantus Firmus No. 1 (rather a grand title, with the theme in middle & upper voices)
- Variation 5: March - Prokofiev
- Variation 6: Romance - Elgar
- Variation 7: Scherzetto (with a hint of Frère Jacques)
- Variation 8: Scherzino
- Variation 9: Cantus Firmus No. 2 (theme in bass)
- Variation 10: Valse - Chopin (with a little help from Beethoven)
- Variation 11: Canon
- Variation 12: Tango
- Variation 13: Rag - Scott Joplin
- Variation 14: Frère Jacques
- Variation 15: Rondo - Mozart
- Variation 16: Waltz - Brahms
- Variation 17: Swingle (with a short and bitter 'suite' introduction from J S Bach)
- Variation 18: Finale (with more reference to Frère Jacques, with some help from Mendelssohn, i.e. a touch of the Violin Concerto, with figuration from his Rondo Capriccioso for piano, Op. 14)

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Clifford Benson - pianist, teacher and composer (17 November 1946 – 10 August 2007) Clifford was born in Grays, Essex into a family of keen amateur musicians. He attended the Royal College of Music Junior Department, where he studied piano with Rhuna Martin and John Barstow, before moving on to Senior College to further his studies with Lamar Crowson and Cyril Smith. He was fortunate also to have coaching from the harpsichordist George Malcolm and to study composition with Herbert Howells. It was during this time that he formed life-long partnerships with the violinist Levon Chilingirian, flautists William Bennett and Trevor Wye, and clarinettist Thea King.

With Levon, he won the BBC Beethoven Duo Competition in 1969, followed by the Munich International Duo Competition in 1971. This led to collaborations with other prestigious artists and he became a regular contributor to BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM. He was a member of the Nash Ensemble in the early years and accompanied the Jacqueline du Pré masterclasses on BBC2 television. Throughout his life, he recorded extensively

as a chamber pianist, soloist and accompanist and he leaves an impressive discography.

Clifford travelled worldwide, giving concerts and masterclasses, and in 2001 he became a Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, London. He loved working with young people and was passionate about his teaching. He ran a yearly summer course for solo pianists and chamber music groups at Frensham Heights, and he was always in demand as an adjudicator. Demanding the highest standards of himself, he did so of others too, but came always from a sympathetic, enthusiastic and encouraging place.

He was one of the most versatile exponents of the keyboard, the consummate musician; his playing was like the man - full of passion, inspiration, poetry, colour and fun.

Michael Dussek made his Wigmore Hall debut in 1980 whilst still a student at the Royal Academy of Music. Subsequently he has been fortunate to work with many of Britain's finest instrumentalists and has partnered leading international soloists in

many of the world's major concert halls. Between 1985 and 1999 he toured regularly throughout the world with cellist Ofra Harnoy and recorded works by Beethoven, Dvorak, Prokofiev and Schubert for RCA. In 2006 he performed a 13-recital tour of Japan with violinist Ryu Goto, including a Suntory Hall recital recorded live by Deutsche Grammophon for CD and DVD.

He has made numerous acclaimed CD recordings and has twice been nominated for a Gramophone Award. Highlights include the first three York Bowen Piano Concertos with Vernon Handley and the BBC Concert Orchestra, the solo piano music of Britten and Rubbra, and Bax songs with Ian Partridge and Jean Rigby. As a member of the Dussek Piano Trio with his wife, cellist Margaret Powell, and violinist Gonzalo Acosta, he has recorded works by Arensky, Brahms, Bridge, Haydn and Hurlstone. As a member of Endymion he has recorded works by Bowen, Dohnanyi, Dunhill, Fibich, Lutyens and Rubbra and has performed at most of the major British festivals.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music where he is also Senior Tutor in Ensemble Piano.

www.michaeldussek.co.uk

Michael Dussek writes: "As a student I often heard Clifford performing at London's Wigmore Hall. Like everyone else I was always deeply impressed by his intuitive musicianship and keyboard mastery. Later it was a thrill to become colleagues and friends on the staff of the Royal Academy of Music. As a teacher he had the rare ability to build a student's confidence whilst also demanding the highest standards. He was revered both by his own students and by those who played to him on an occasional basis.

"The invitation which he extended to me to record his piano compositions was, because of the circumstances, desperately sad. Yet it also became one of the most rewarding and moving experiences of my professional life. As I struggled in the necessarily limited time available to master these often tricky pieces I was the recipient of Clifford's demanding yet

encouraging tuition. To have the opportunity to record these beautiful, witty, deeply musical compositions under his supervision was truly a privilege."

John Reid read music at Clare College, Cambridge, before taking up a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Music with Michael Dussek. He has also taken lessons in song interpretation with Malcolm Martineau and, privately in Amsterdam, with Rudolf Jansen. His many awards include the 2003 Kathleen Ferrier and Maggie Teyte accompaniment prizes, the 2003 Birmingham Accompanist of the Year (joint first prize), the 2004 Gerald Moore Award and the Queen's Commendation for excellence, presented by the Academy.

Over the last few years, John has made a number of significant recital debuts: at Wigmore Hall in May 2004 (with soprano Lucy Crowe); at the Purcell Room (as a 2004 Park Lane Group Young Artist); in Germany, at the Mecklenburg Festival (with flautist Adam Walker) and in Switzerland, Italy and the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam

(with trumpeter Alison Balsom). He has partnered distinguished singers Joan Rodgers and Anthony Rolfe-Johnson, flautist William Bennett, cellist Alexander Baillie and violinist Jennifer Pike and, together with his regular duo partner, violinist Thomas Gould, he has performed at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Wigmore Hall, Bridgewater Hall, St. George's Brandon Hill, Purcell Room and in festivals across the UK. He is a regular member of the Aurora Orchestra and the contemporary music ensemble Radius.

John is an alumnus of the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme and was a founder member of the Royal Academy of Music Song Circle, whose debut disc ('Songs of Spring') was released to critical acclaim. Other recent projects include first recordings of music by Charles Camilleri (on Divine Art) and Rhian Samuel (on Deux-Elles).

www.johnreidpiano.com

Recorded at Potton Hall, March 2007

Producer: Jeremy Hayes

Engineer: Tony Faulkner

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Design: Grade Design

Booklet Notes: Dilys Benson

Cover Photo: John Allwork

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