Saturday 13 May 2017, 3.30pm

Piano Weekend 2
Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji
*Opus Clavicembalisticum*

Jonathan Powell *piano*

St Hilda’s College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
Pre-Concert Talk - 2.30pm with Alistair Hinton
Composer and director of the Sorabji Archive (www.sorabji-archive.co.uk)

Concert - 7.30pm
Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji - Opus clavicembalisticum McMxxx

PARS PRIMA
I. INTROITO
II. PRELUDIO CORALE
III. FUGA I
IV. FANTASIA
V. FUGA A DUE SOGGETTI

PARS ALTERA
VI. INTERLUDIUM PRIMUM
(TEMA CUM XLIX VARIATIONIBUS)
VII. CADENZA I

- Interval -

VIII. FUGA A TRE SOGGETTI

PARS TERTIA
IX. INTERLUDIUM ALTERUM
(TOCCATA: ADAGIO: PASSACAGLIA CUM LXXXI VARIATIONIBUS)

- Interval -

X. CADENZA II
XI. FUGA A QUATTRO SOGGETTI
XII. CODA STRETTA

TO MY TWO FRIENDS (E DUOBUS UNUS):

HUGH M’DIARMID
AND
C.M.GRIEVE
LIKEWISE

TO THE EVERLASTING GLORY OF THOSE FEW MEN
BLESSED AND SANCTIFIED IN THE CURSES AND EXECRATIONS OF THOSE MANY
WHOSE PRAISE IS ETERNAL DAMNATION
Sorabji’s *Opus clavicembalisticum* is stuff of legend, more talked and written about than heard, music of proportions and hue so ‘other’. It’s a coming-of-age work, a masterpiece in the Renaissance sense of the word: one where an artist creates for the first time – not without risk – a bold statement and something truly in their own image. With its Baroque structures it is at once Bachian but its sound reaches far into the future; like several of Sorabji’s pieces, its duration extends far outside the norms of Western concert music. While the myth of unplayability associated with Sorabji’s music has long been dispelled, the aura of transcendental concentration for both performer and audience still surrounds presentations of his work.

For the form and to a certain extent the style of *Opus clavicembalisticum*, Sorabji took as a starting point Busoni’s *Fantasia contrappuntistica* (which itself had started life as a completion of the final contrapunctus of Bach’s *The Art of Fugue*); the result is clearly intended as a homage to the Italian composer-pianist. Sorabji idolised Busoni whom he had heard in concert in the early 1920s and also met in person. Like its model, Sorabji’s composition is essentially a series of fugues, prefaced by an *Introito* and *Preludio corale*, and interspersed with two cadenzas and two extensive *interludia*.

Already immersed in the music of Scriabin, Alkan, Busoni and Ives, I became aware of Sorabji’s music in my early teens when he heard a BBC broadcast of Yonty Solomon playing the composer’s First Piano Sonata. Soon after, while looking for Sorabji’s scores in a local library, I came across the score of *Opus clavicembalisticum*. I started performing Sorabji’s music in the 1990s, and by the early 2000s had a number of recordings and world premières to my name. I gave my first performance of *Opus clavicembalisticum* privately at the Sorabji Archive in September 2003 on the composer’s own, rather aged, Steinway, and shortly after gave a public performance at the Purcell Room, London, to utter critical dismay from newspaper reviewers, but resounding acclaim from the capacity audience, fellow-musicians and journal critics. I then went on to play the work in New York, Helsinki and St Petersburg during 2004—05. I return to *Opus clavicembalisticum* having in the meantime given the first performances of Sorabji’s Piano Symphony no.6 and *Sequentia cylica* (recently completing a studio recording of the latter) and with the great benefit of a new, very clear edition from which to play.

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Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (1892—1988) was the son of a Parsi civil engineer from Mumbai and an English soprano. He completed over 100 pieces between 1915 and 1984; these include orchestral works, a large number of concertos and other pieces for piano and orchestra, chamber music, songs for voice and piano, three colossal organ symphonies and many works for piano solo. He was also active as a pianist (until 1936) and critic (until the later 1940s). A few scores were published between 1919 and 1931; since the 1990s new editions of most of his works have been made and are available from the Sorabji Archive. Sorabji received no formal training at a music conservatoire but when he began to compose in the mid-1910s he was already au courant with a great deal of new European music (such as Schoenberg, Debussy, Scriabin, Szymanowski, Busoni etc). A disastrous performance in 1936 of part of his Opus clavicembalisticum led him to strongly discourage any further public airings of his music, explaining that ‘no performance at all’ is vastly preferable to ‘an obscene travesty’; while such a protective instinct is understandable in principle, Sorabji is perhaps the only composer of note ever to have given expression to it and then attempted to see it through in practice. He was well aware that ‘performers with the sheer grit, determination and staying power ever to attempt his very forbidding scores’ would be such ‘raræ aves that they may be relied on to deduce, from internal evidence, what sort of treatment the music calls for’. The notes to be mastered, for him, were ‘a pretty effective barrier to the typical artistic incompetence and nincompoopery of the many-too-many of the virtuoso tribe’. However, in 1976 Sorabji finally relented in favour of the pianist Yonty Solomon, whom he had heard in BBC broadcasts that impressed him greatly. Solomon’s subsequent performances of several of Sorabji’s works led to increasing international interest: many more performers began to produce performances, broadcasts and commercial recordings bringing the music an ever-widening group of admirers.

The first known reference to Opus clavicembalisticum dates from 25 December 1929. Having recently attended three recitals by Egon Petri and two performances of Busoni’s Fantasia contrappuntistica, one by Petri and one by another of Busoni’s pupils, Eduard Steuermann (1892–1964), Sorabji wrote of the “rather terrifying quality of the work, its monumental grandeur, its severe and ascetic splendour, its eerie magnificence, its utter uniqueness”, adding that it was “a terrible as well as a mighty work, for, like the Hammerklavier, it will turn and rend any rash weakling who dares to try to invoke it”. Busoni’s work and its performance were for him a religious, even mystical, experience—and this was to be true of Opus clavicembalisticum. On 25 December 1929 Sorabji had reached the end of “Fuga I” of the “very large and complex new piano work” then called Opus sequentiale. He admitted that it was inspired by Busoni’s Fantasia contrappuntistica and provided a “Constitution of the Work”; but for matters of terminology, it corresponds to that of the published score’s title page. He must have put his new work aside for a few days at the beginning of 1930 to prepare for the first public performance of Nocturne, “Jâmi” that he was to give at Westminster Congregational Church on 16 January. From 14 March onwards
he devoted himself again to the preparation of another performance, namely, that of *Sonata IV for Piano*, to be given on 1 April. Shortly after his return from Glasgow, upon reaching the end of the second variation of “Interludium primum”, he decided to change the work’s title to *Opus clavicembalisticum*. Sorabji expected to complete “the sternest, most uncompromising work I have ever done, austere, ascetic”. Sorabji explained to his friend the composer Erik Chisholm the meaning of the Latin title: “Opus = a work; Clavicembalum = a cymbalon with keys; plus termination = isticum = adjectival indicating belonging to or pertaining to.” On 25 June he could at last announce that he had completed the composition.

‘With a racking head and literally my whole body shaking as with ague I write this and tell you that I have just this afternoon early finished *Clavicembalisticum* (252 pages ...) […] The closing 4 pages are as cataclysmic and catastrophic as anything I’ve ever done—the harmony bites like nitric acid, the counterpoint grinds like the mills of God to close finally on this implacable monosyllable: [musical example representing the work’s final G sharp minor chord in the left hand with a quasi-cluster chord (B–D–F–G–A–B) in the right hand] “I am the Spirit that denies!”’ [Letter to Erik Chisholm]

Here Sorabji refers to the final dissonant chord, which defeats the listener’s expectation of a powerful and rich consonant sonority (most probably that of C sharp major, given its importance elsewhere in the work), and refers to the words spoken by Mephistopheles shortly after his entrance in the first *Studierzimmer* scene in Goethe’s *Faust* (line 1338: “Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint!”).

*Opus clavicembalisticum* comprises three *partes* consisting of five, three, and four movements, respectively. The movements are ordered so that each *pars* contains a balance of fugues, virtuoso sections in toccata style, and variations. The very short *Introito* opens with a starkly declaimed motto of fourteen notes leading to a low D sharp, which becomes the top note of a D sharp minor chord in first inversion; both the motto and the chord are used several times as a unifying device. The motto contains ten of the twelve chromatic pitches except C sharp (a most important structural axis in the work) and D. The “Introito” also states two further chorale-like motives, which are closely related to the theme of the “Preludio corale” from Busoni’s *Fantasia contrappuntistica*.

The *Preludio-corale* that follows, an even clearer link to the initial section of Busoni’s masterpiece, opens with a modified statement of the motto. It works out the thematic ideas heard previously and anticipates the incipit of “Fuga I” twice. Throughout this section, the runs of thirds, the chords built of superimposed thirds, the series of tremolos, and the pedal points recall both the techniques and the sound of Busoni’s work. *Fuga I*, in a moderate tempo, uses a very short subject in slow values against two countersubjects. This subject is quite similar in outline to “Contrapunctus XV” from Bach’s *Art of Fugue*, also found in Busoni’s *Fantasia*...
contrappuntistica as the subject of the first fugue. The fugue ends on a G sharp minor chord in the low register; this chord is also found in the left hand of the entire work’s final sonority. A virtuoso Fantasia provides relief from the contrapuntal texture. This toccata-like section states quite prominently the opening motto and the incipit of “Fuga I” and, near the end, the dedicatee’s musical initials. The first subject of the Fuga II is a long animated theme in quavers, with only two instances of semiquavers as ornamentation; the second one is more varied rhythmically. Yet the result is essentially a massive movement in even rhythmic values.

The theme of the Interludium primum consists of two almost similar strains in slow and long note values in the medium register above a series of rich chords in crotchets, each ending on a noble C sharp major chord, a sonority that will become prominent later; the second statement is a fourth higher than the first one. The theme’s mostly stepwise shape recalls the Busoni-inspired motive and the theme of “Fuga I”. The variations are grouped into six sections ending with a fermata (nos. 1–6, 7–14, 15–23, 24–32, 33–38, 49). Cadenza I, a furious toccata, begins with a semiquaver run notated on a single line. The first page recalls the second countersubject of “Fuga I” as well as the dedicatee’s initials. The music grows until a brief fanfare-like, pompous, and heavy bitonal chordal passage, after which the toccata style resumes above an E= pedal point (= D sharp) held almost throughout. In its sharp version, this note refers to the opening chord of both the “Introito” and the “Interludium alterum”.

Fuga tertia triplex, which at more than thirty minutes is longer than the previous two, features long, sinuous subjects consisting mostly of crotchets and quavers, with very few instances of semiquavers (these only in the initial subject). It concludes very slowly and massively on a C sharp major sonority (with added notes). The tripartite Interludium alterum is the most massive movement of the work. It lasts about an hour and requires Herculean stamina. The introductory “Toccata” begins with the D sharp minor sonority heard at the very opening, above which is heard a variant of the motto. Like the previous two virtuoso sections, it relies mostly on capricious runs of semiquavers; long bitonal ascending and descending scales are also featured extensively. The “Adagio” is the work’s only section in nocturne style and the only complete one in a slow tempo. Again, the C sharp major sonority is emphasized in three contrasting passages consisting of long series of chords. The final gesture, indeed, is a descending series of chords played “Adagissimo” above a C sharp major chord in the low register; it concludes on an even richer version of the same chord, sounded ff. The eighty-one variations of the “Passacaglia” are based on an ostinato that has much in common with the third subject of “Fuga IV”. Some sections may be singled out. Var. 53, marked “Quasi tambura”, consists of a highly ornamented, Oriental-sounding melody pitted against an F sharp–B ostinato played in semiquavers over the keyboard’s entire range; the pedal point, reduced to F sharp continues into var. 54. The last two variations, spread on four staves, state the theme in chords;
whatever free space remains between the thematic notes is filled with frightening runs consisting of alternating dyads and triads; the final variation amplifies the climax even more by filling the space between the notes with the chordal equivalent of blind octaves. It is doubtful that anyone, including Sorabji, has ever written a more powerful passage for two hands. As one may expect, this gigantic peal of bells ends on a C sharp major chord; it is followed by a short “Epilogo” consisting of a final statement of the theme.

**Cadenza II** requires that the pianist still have stamina to spare—the “Passacaglia” is not the end of pars altera but the third section of the opening movement of *pars tertia*—to attack an expansive toccata, marked “Vivo”, all above an A pedal point throughout, that is, at a distance of a tritone from “Cadenza I”. **Fuga IV quadruplex** offers more variety in its choice of subjects than the previous fugues. Whereas the first one is the usual mixture of quavers, crotchets, and minims, the second one is a very swiftly moving line of twenty-eight beats, mostly in semiquavers. For the third subject, Sorabji returns to a severe style, mostly in long note values. The final subject, again very long (twenty-seven beats), is a most capricious line exhibiting considerable rhythmic variety. The fourth fugue ends with three strettos (“Le strette”), in which the final subject is presented five times in very close succession. The **Coda-Stretta** is marked “Quasi organo pieno”. At one point, after a final statement of the opening motto and amid the gigantic peal of chords into which he has transformed the second subject of “Fuga IV”, Sorabji recalls the theme of “Fuga I” before reaching a powerful D flat = (= C sharp) sonority, which provides the basis for a blazing run covering the entire keyboard. This opens the way to a final contrapuntal section involving the first subjects of the first three fugues. A final surge of radiant sonorities is reached when a glorious C sharp major chord marks the end of the stretto and the beginning of the concluding “Più largo”. From the active chordal figurations in rapid note values emerges a magnificent sequence of chords, the top notes of which match those of the subject of “Fuga I”, thus rounding out the entire structure with a forceful reminder of how this huge complex of ten fugues began. The final G sharp minor chord, a link with the end of “Fuga I”, is sounded again in the low register with a major ninth chord on G in first inversion above it. As mentioned earlier, Sorabji almost sadistically defeats the listener’s expectation of a C sharp major sonority, so often heard at important structural points, and prefers to be the “spirit that denies”. Seen in the perspective of his entire output, *Opus clavicembalisticum* is only one of many peaks, because Sorabji, between 1931 and 1964, would write eight works for solo piano of approximately the same length or even longer. It is one of the longest, most ambitious works ever written for any solo instrument only when one does not know what was to follow.

© Marc-André Roberge, from his *Opus Sorabjianum*
Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (1892–1988) remains a towering legendary figure in 20th-century music and his monumentally complex, richly textured and charismatically original scores are rarely performed in public. Fortunately now a powerful group of aficionados has most successfully taken up the formidable challenge of presenting his work to highly enthusiastic audiences both in Europe and the USA. I am indeed immensely proud to be an integral part of this historical and dramatic development. I was fortunate and blessed to be the first pianist to gain Sorabji’s permission to perform in 1976 his music in England at Wigmore Hall after a self-imposed ban by the composer for almost forty years.

An attempt by me to programme the massive Opus clavicembalisticum at the Queen Elizabeth Hall during the early 1970s resulted in swift refusal by Sorabji through the publisher Oxford University Press and the venture had to be abandoned. However, some months later when I played the Charles Ives ‘Concord’ Sonata in Bristol, Alistair Hinton was in the audience and came backstage. We chatted amiably about pianistic matters and I discovered to my delight that Alistair was a very enthusiastic partisan of Sorabji. He was almost like a son to the composer and has done more than anyone else to further the recognition of his music world-wide. Alistair immediately phoned Sorabji to tell him of my passionate wish to perform his piano music, and Sorabji with sweetest and unexpected encouragement agreed, bestowing his blessings. The first London performances after so many years of this fiercely intricate yet hypnotic music attracted immense interest from both the public and critics. This was followed by numerous BBC broadcasts and concerts.

Subsequently, I visited Sorabji at his imposing home near Corfe Castle. He played to me and I also played his music to him. It was a memorable occasion altogether. He spontaneously complimented me on my tone, the colours and the understanding and identifying with the idiom of his wonderfully torpid, tropical nocturne-like Le Jardin parfumé. The sensuously iridescent nuances, sheer transcendental magic of its poetry and filigree piano writing, prophetic perhaps of much comparable in Messiaen, have always appealed to me. I love the work. Incidentally, Frederick Delius wrote to Sorabji in 1930 after his only ever BBC broadcast recital congratulating him on the beauty of the composition.

Sorabji became a greatly caring friend mostly through volcanically expressive letters and vivid telephone conversations, remembering one’s birthday with a special and thoughtful gift, and the generous praise in response to one’s broadcast performances. Later he sent me the dedication of his fabulous Third Piano Sonata.

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About the music itself – the extravagantly opulent, exoticism and intellectuality of his monumental compositions bring together with dazzling virtuosity the ineffable flow between the East and West, striking some primordial chord in the engulfed
and mesmerised listener. In the process of learning his work, I too learnt a new approach to my own playing the piano. Sorabji himself was a wizard and monarch of the keyboard. His fingers even at an advanced age raced across the instrument with almost subliminal bravura and vertiginous speed. He produced colours of finest graded nuances rivalling the Horowitz palette of sonorities.

Sorabji’s roots perhaps are in the exploratory styles of Busoni, Szymanowski, Scriabin and even to a certain extent Rachmaninoff. All of these composers are supremely pianistic figures dominating our perceptions of post-Romantic musical genres; they all possessed idiosyncratically original insights into a monumental utilisation of the piano in orchestral terms. But with Kaikhosru Sorabji a unique contributory factor is the explosive fusion of his Parsi origins with the debonair sophistication of the world of the Sitwells and other contemporaneous intellectuals who created their own artistic milieu with such defined personality traits. The profusion of eastern raga-like improvisations, melismatic chanting, modal tonalities and atonalities, are an inherent part of Sorabji’s creative genius. The mammoth piano technique inherent in his works is kaleidoscopically diverse and a virtuosic approach is as necessary as a profoundly sensitive ear for a wide spectrum of sonorities from utmost delicacy to volcanic ferocity.
A Creative Journey: Sorabji’s letters to Erik Chisholm during the composition of *Opus clavicembalisticum*

Sorabji first met Chisholm in 1929 when he played his Fourth Sonata for Chisholm’s Active Society for the Propagation of Contemporary Music in Glasgow. The letters demonstrate the closeness of their friendship – Sorabji once referred to Chisholm as his ‘other soul’ – a friendship that lasted until Chisholm’s death.

25.xii.1929: ‘Actually I am very much involved and wrapped up in a very large and complex new piano work *Opus Sequentiale* inspired admittedly by the Fantasia Contrapuntistica of Busoni with which I presume to flatter myself it has a mood feeling not at all un-kin.’

14.iii.1930: ‘The second fugue of the *Opus Sequentiale* completed yesterday after a perfect Hell of a stretto – it’s already 60pp. long and I’m not half way through it yet!!’

5.iv.1930: ‘*Opus Sequentiale* is to be renamed *Opus clavicembalisticum*. I had meant to play you the first 60pp. and indeed carted it up to Glasgow with that end in view – but there was so much other to do and talk about that it was pushed into the background. It will be longer than the 4th Sonata.’ *The Fourth Sonata is about two hours long; Sorabji had given the first performance of the work on 1 April 1930.*

11.iv.1930: ‘Yes. I will come to Glasgow next Season for another recital if you really want me to, but I think the *Opus clavicembalisticum* would be better. It ought to be done in 2 or 3 months now, although the biggest and most intricate parts are yet to come, i.e. the 3rd and 4th Fugues with the Passacaglia and Stretta. It is the sternest and most uncompromising work I have ever done, austere, ascetic – it ought to be liked in Glasgow I think, dark and menacing in feeling. I like it very well myself.’

20.iv.1930: ‘(after Variation 36) Loud and enthusiastic applause! 4 variations today … at this rate anything may happen. Eblis himself is to be invoked in 49.’ *Eblis is an Islamic equivalent of Satan.*

5.v.1930: ‘I must return to the Triple Fugue for a space … it [the ink] is dry and calls in reproach contrapuntally plaintive tones! … so I go where it calls me damn and blast it I am going to hate it before it’s done!! Three intricately wrought Fugue pages today: I feel so nervy and restless tonight …’

28.v.1930: ‘The toccata is now five pages longer that it was when you saw it on Monday – very well proportioned I think – now comes the *Adagio* grave and tenderly serious as it will be I hope.’
1.vi.1930: ‘The Adagio of Interlude II finished yesterday night in a stately procession of 37 chords in ever changing harmony right down from the top of the keyboard on a held C sharp major chord – very impressive I think.’

3.vi.1930: ‘Twenty variations of the Passacaglia since I started this. My head is burning inside and I’m trembling …’

5.vi.1930: “Clavicembalisticum” grows apace 39 of the 81 passacaglia variations are now done. It will be about as long as Dies Irae if not, only a very little less, but miles and miles beyond it in every way. I shall probably – indeed I am thinking – of destroying Dies Irae – I have been looking on it with a sour cold eye and I don’t think really it pleases me any more … and write an entirely new work thereon later. How’s that for an idea? Digest it and tell me what you think of it.’ Sorabji wrote his ‘Variazione e fuga triplice sopra Dies Irae’ between 1923 and 1926; he returned to the theme in 1948 with the ‘Sequentia Cyclic super Dies Irae ex Missa pro defunctis’, a work he considered far superior to its predecessor.

11/12.vi.1930: ‘Kyrie Eleison! the 81st variation – a tremendous think in broken alternating chords up and down the keyboard finished this pomeriggio verso le 2!!! Now the second cadenza and Fugue IV only. … Have just added an epilogue to the passacaglia a quiet repetition of the theme over slow moving darkly coloured harmony – most effective!’

15.vi.1930: I started the last fugue today and finished Cadenza II but it is a marvellous work although I say it as shouldn’t! And it is getting on my nerves and it is wearing me down!’

25.vi.1930: ‘With a wracking head and literally my whole body shaking as with ague I write this and tell you I have just this afternoon early finished Clavicembalisticum (252 pages – longer than Dies IRAE and immeasurably better … the final Coda Stretta is an achievement with the 4 forms of each subject running through the fabric linked with quotations of earlier fugue subjects declaimed with massive vehemence. The closing 4 pages are so cataclysmic and catastrophic as anything I’ve ever done – the harmony bites like nitric acid the counterpoint grinds like the mills of God to close finally on this implacable monosyllable – “I am the spirit that denies!” But how it’s drained me … I feel like Christ when he said Virtue has gone out of me! And I too: all my courage all my strength!! God! I am a half dead thing!’

[Here Sorabji refers to the final dissonant chord, which defeats the listener’s expectation of a powerful and rich consonant sonority (most probably that of C sharp major, given its importance elsewhere in the work), and refers to the words spoken by Mephistopheles shortly after his entrance in the first Studierzimmer scene in Goethe’s Faust (line 1338: “Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint!”).]
Jonathan Powell is a pianist and composer. He studied the piano with Denis Matthews and Sulamita Aronovsky. After concentrating on composition during the 1990s, he then established an international career as a soloist. He has a particular interest in contemporary music and composers of the early 20th century: in particular the music of Scriabin and other Russian modernists, as well as Ives, Szymanowski, Busoni, and others. Over the last decade, concerts have taken him on a tour across the US, to the Musica Sacra Festival in Maastricht, the contemporary series hosted by the Fundación BBVA in Bilbao, the Musica Nova Festival in Helsinki, the Festival Radio France Montpellier, Borealis Festival in Bergen, the Huddersfield Festival of Contemporary Music, recital broadcasts for Radio Netherlands and Radio Deutschland Kultur, the Raritäten der Klaviermusik am Schloss vor Husum, Vredenburg Muziekcentrum in Utrecht, De Toonzaal in ’S Hertogenbosch, and in the Jewish Museum and Altes Rathaus, Vienna. His recent concerto appearances include Brahms’ 2nd (with the Slovak Philharmonic), Liszt’s Malédiction (with the Kiev Soloists), Finnissy’s 2nd Concerto (at the Moscow Conservatoire) and Sørensen’s 2nd (with the Prague Philharmonia under Marian Lejava). During 2013 he made international tours featuring Messiaen’s Vingt regards sur l’enfant Jésus and Albeniz’ Iberia respectively, while in late 2014 he made an eight-concert tour of the US taking in Seattle, Denver, NY and Chicago. During 2015 he gave numerous performances of Beethoven’s Hammerklavier sonata and Reger’s Bach Variations. Current activities include a tour featuring the complete piano works of Xenakis (including the Chopin Academy Warsaw) and, in 2017, Beethoven op.109, Liszt’s Sonata, Stockhausen’s Klavierstücke and several performances of Sorabji’s Opus clavicembalisticum including some in China. In 2018 he is due to perform a series of concerts in Darmstadt, the complete works of Luciano Berio, and the 24 Preludes and Fugues, op.87, by Shostakovich. His CD releases encompass the works of Alexander Krein, Felix Blumenfeld, Alexander Goldenweiser, Konstantin Eigis, Georgiy Conus, Leonid Sabaneyev, Egon Kornauth, Janis Medinš, Kaikhosru Sorabji, Joseph Marx, Isay Dobrowen, Alexander Scriabin, Jean Sibelius and others. Masterclasses, lecture-recitals and coaching have taken Powell to the Janáček Academy (Brno), Oxford University, the Guildhall School and Music and Drama (London), Cornish College of Arts (Seattle), and Det Jyske Musikkonservatorium (Esbjerg and Odense, Denmark), among others. As a chamber musician, he has worked with ‘cellist Rohan de Saram, violinist Ashot Sarkisjan, flautist Matteo Cesari, and sopranos Svetlana Sozdateleva, Irena Troupova and Sarah Leonard. Powell has worked with several of today’s prominent composers, in particular Claudio Ambrosini, and Michael Finnissy. He is currently awaiting a new solo work from Arturas Bumšteinas, and other new pieces are planned for 2018 from Chris Dench Gabriel Erkoreka, James Erber and Marian Lejava. Powell is a self-taught composer – he has recorded several of his own works for BBC broadcasts and has received performances by the London Sinfonietta, the Arditti Quartet, Valdine Anderson, and Nicolas Hodges among others. His articles on many aspects of Russian music appear in the New Grove Dictionary of Music. He lives in southern Poland.
Alistair Hinton was born in Scotland. Hearing John Ogdon playing Chopin’s 4th Ballade on the radio at the age of 11 gave rise to the altogether understandable wish to become a composer; (“I just wanted to know how music was made – and to make some of my own”). His first Sonata for piano appeared shortly afterwards; it displays some facility in its assimilation of fleetingly encountered influences. He continued his musical studies simply by studying music, passionately (“one learns composition by composing, as one learns wine-tasting by tasting wine”). His early work attracted the interest of Benjamin Britten, with whose help he attended Royal College of Music, London for lessons with Humphrey Searle and Stephen Savage. His music dates from 1962 but he destroyed much of his 1960s and early 1970s output.

A significant encouragement of his compositional development was provided by the music, literature and friendship of Parsi composer Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, which played an important role in exposing him to crucial formative influences, including Szymanowski, Busoni, van Dieren, Medtner, Godowsky and Stevenson; these, together with a deepening admiration for Chopin, were to enhance his love of the piano and preoccupation with the challenge of writing for it.

Having persuaded Sorabji in 1976 of the wisdom of relaxing the long-standing embargo that he had placed on public performance of his music, he took an active part in fostering international interest in it. This led to his founding The Sorabji Music Archive, of which he is curator. Based in Bath, England, the organisation was renamed The Sorabji Archive in 1993 and relocated to Hereford in 2008. It is a research source for performers and scholars, maintains a continuously expanding collection of literature by and about the composer, assists and oversees the compilation of new authentic editions and issues copies of his scores and literary writings to the public.
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with a pre-concert talk at 6:45pm

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