

THE MEMORY GARDEN

GUITAR MUSIC FROM ENGLAND



JACK HANCHER

DEUX-ELLES: This is a debut CD, which is really exciting. What inspired you with the repertoire of Dowland, Britten and Arnold? Is it something that you just have an affinity with?

JACK: Well, first and foremost, it's fantastic repertoire – amongst the best we have. It forces you as a performer to get everything out of the instrument, especially in its range of dynamics and colours. It's also repertoire I've been playing for a while now so it felt like a natural choice to record for a debut disc.

DE: Yes, you're really under the skin of it.

JACK: The Arnold Fantasy has been with me on and off for about 14 years now. Dowland I came to when I was at conservatoire, and it's more intimate music, which suits the way I like to play.

DE: And what about the Britten Nocturnal?

JACK: The Britten I deliberately avoided for a while, because I feel it's such a challenge to weave all that material over nearly twenty minutes

and weave it in a cohesive way. I wanted to wait until I'd matured more as a musician before tackling it. I also got to know other music by Britten (and Dowland as well) before learning the piece. Nocturnal really does force you to get everything out of the guitar's range of colour, and to be creative with that use of colour. My imagination was let loose learning the piece, to the point where I was actually marking in the score which section of an orchestra I imagined might play a particular phrase or passage.

DE: I like that! Have you got some examples?

JACK: In the 4th variation, "Uneasy", I've marked in various wind instruments over the opening motifs to imagine the effect of these phrases being passed around. I've also marked "cymbals" above each of the chords, which I've also done in the 2nd variation, going for a more aggressive and almost percussive attack in those moments.

DE: And how influenced were you by Julian Bream's recording? Or have you tried to remain independent from that?

JACK: Yes, I deliberately didn't listen to Bream's recording whilst I was learning the piece. I didn't want this to be my interpretation of "Bream's Nocturnal", if you see what I mean. And I really do think everything is in the score anyway. A lot of the piece is marked *pp* or even quieter, which naturally creates this intimate and intense atmosphere. Britten was meticulous with his scores, so when he's written on a guitar score *pp* or *ppp* with a diminuendo, it raises the question: how audible is this intended to be for someone at the back of the concert hall? Part of what I try to do is to almost "adjust" the listener's ear by staying in these low dynamic markings for long periods of time, which then really heightens the impact of the louder moments and can help create the illusion of the guitar sounding big.

DE: The Arnold has an interesting structure, doesn't it? A single Fantasy in seven sections?

JACK: Yes, the structure of the piece is quite unusual. It's bookended by a Prelude and Postlude which are the same material but expanded on in the Postlude. The 2nd movement is a Scherzo, some of which returns in the penultimate movement, March.

The centerpiece is the Fughetta, with an Arietta on either side of it.

DE: Was it another Bream commission?

JACK: Yes. It's not as widely played as Britten's Nocturnal, but I think it offers something very different. There are more light-hearted moments and more playfulness in the Arnold.

DE: In the March you've got this snare drum effect - perhaps you could explain how you create the sound.

JACK: You create the sound by pulling the sixth string over the fifth so they're crossed over then both strings are struck by the thumb in the right hand - it's a good stamina test for the left hand!

DE: You've rounded out your programme with two new commissions. How did you come to work with Laura Snowden and Dani Howard?

JACK: I wanted to approach two composers who were on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their experience writing for the guitar. Dani ▶

hadn't written for the guitar before and she's not a guitarist herself, so she was always going to have a completely different approach to Laura, who is a guitarist and has written for the guitar numerous times. I'd heard a lot of Laura's music before, some of which involves some singing or humming. But that wouldn't really have suited how I play or my stage persona, so I asked Laura when I approached her to not to make me sing! She'd written a piece in tribute to Julian Bream after he passed away, and that was the side of her composition I wanted to explore more of. She's written me a beautiful piece, something I immediately felt a connection with and this slightly more reflective, peaceful moment in the album is a lovely contrast.

DE: It really is. And with Dani, did you have any discussions about the guitar or did you just let her get on with it?

JACK: I was very hands-off, really. I'd heard Dani's music through recordings and then I went to watch her trombone concerto written for Peter Moore. I met up with Dani afterwards and

asked her if she'd be interested in writing for the guitar and she said she would love to. Within a month or two, we'd started exchanging videos or meeting up face to face, which allowed me to demonstrate things like natural and artificial harmonics. The guitar is a notoriously difficult instrument to write for, especially if you don't play it. But she really got it - the first draft she sent through was 100% playable, albeit very challenging at times. I didn't want to get involved in the composition process. I essentially said to Dani, "I love how you write and what you do. Crack on and create that as best you can for the guitar".

DE: How does it compare to her trombone concerto?

JACK: It's a completely different sound world, but there are definitely some aspects of her trombone concerto that drew me to her music that are also in the guitar piece - for example, some of the harmonic language and even some of the textures. Even so, I think the piece she's written for me is really unique.

DE: Yes, when I first heard it I thought, this is something really special.

JACK: When people have asked me what can you compare it to, I've really struggled - which is a great sign. I can't say it reminds me of this piece or that composer, and I think it's further proof as to why she's considered one of the most exciting composers around.

DE: They're both beautiful pieces, and it's great to see you continuing the lineage of guitarists expanding

the repertoire by reaching out to composers they admire, since that's also how the Britten and Arnold pieces came into being.

JACK: I like the idea of seeing what new directions composers can find for taking the instrument in and taking it forward into the 21st century. The album has been an amazing experience, from start to finish. ■

DANI HOWARD

"You Don't Have to Tell me Twice" for solo guitar was written for Jack Hancher, and features the many tones and colours he is able to produce from the instrument. The piece explores the idea of how the same thing, said in different ways, can in fact mean something very different. To go one step further, it looks into how we often derive different meaning from the same words, spoken by different people. Sometimes you do in fact need to hear it twice (or more...)

Simplistic in its material, though developed gradually throughout, the piece grows through small

ideas involving the natural harmonics of the instrument, in combination with non-harmonics (of the same pitch). These evolve and expand ▶



PHOTO BY EMMA FERDIN

rhythmically, and through changes in tone. The way in which Jack performs these differences and shifts in tone throughout is remarkable, and you can hear this so vividly in this album recording.

I found it really challenging yet fascinating to write for the guitar for the first time. It is extremely complex

in the way that range does not function in a linear way (as it does for many other instruments). Because of this however, the instrument offers far more opportunities and harmonic possibilities, which has been an exciting journey to be on while composing this work, and I look forward to writing more for the guitar. ■

Dani Howard

Laura Snowden

I have two wonderful grandmas, and this piece was written in honour of both of them. I have imagined stepping into an enchanted garden in which I am both myself as I am now and a child again, re-experiencing some of my most beautiful memories with each of my

grandmas. I wanted to create the sense of wonder, discovery, and magic which both of my grandmas brought to my life from an early age. At the start of the piece, I have imagined being taken gently by the hand by my grandma as we take our first steps into the garden, her showing me things I have never seen before – fairies dancing, extraordinary flowers, swirling colours and flickering particles of light. As the piece reaches its climax, I imagine my heart swelling as I whirl around with my grandma, the world around us spinning and disappearing as we joyfully dance hand-in-hand. As the climax winds down, the opening material then returns in a new light. ■

Laura Snowden



PHOTO BY SCODIA.BFF

JACK HANCHER

Described by Gendai Guitar Magazine as a “poet and a painter, colouring sounds out of the guitar as if his imagination and the guitar were one”, Jack Hancher is a rising star of the classical guitar. In 2022, he won the prestigious Gold Medal of the Royal Overseas League Competition at London’s Wigmore Hall, becoming just the third guitarist to win the award. This was preceded in 2021 by a tour of several European Guitar Festivals as a EuroStrings Artist.

In 2020, Jack won a string of awards at various guitar competitions, including First Prize at both the Zagreb Guitar Festival Competition and the Plovdiv GuitArt Festival Competition and in 2021, he was awarded Second Prize at the Altamira International Guitar Competition. In 2018, Jack performed at Wigmore Hall, London, playing his arrangements of Albeniz’s piano music. In 2017, he was accepted onto the International Guitar Foundation (IGF) Young Artists Platform and performed at the IGF London Guitar Festival at Kings Place, London in October that year. Jack has performed across Europe including with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Christian Karlsen, in venues such as the Großer



PHOTO BY HANNAH JESSIE

Ehrbar Saal, Vienna, St David’s Hall, Cardiff and has performed live on BBC Radio 3’s In Tune.

Jack has given Masterclasses at Conservatoires around Europe, including at the Royal College of Music, London and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff.

Jack is an Augustine Strings Artist. ■

DXL1206

JOHN DOWLAND

- 1 *Praeludium, P.98* 1:19
- 2 *Fantasia, P.1* 4:16
- 3 *Forlorn Hope Fancy, P.2* 4:02

MALCOLM ARNOLD

Fantasy for Guitar Op. 107

- 4 *I. Prelude* 1:24
- 5 *II. Scherzo* 3:01
- 6 *III. Arietta 1* 2:20
- 7 *IV. Fughetta* 1:16
- 8 *V. Arietta 2* 1:51
- 9 *VI. March* 1:42
- 10 *VII. Postlude* 1:13

LAURA SNOWDEN

- 11 *The Memory Garden (premiere recording)* 5:31

DANI HOWARD

- 12 *You Don't Have To Tell Me Twice (premiere recording)* 6:53

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Nocturnal after John Dowland Op.70

- 13 *I. Musingly* 2:15
- 14 *II. Very Agitated* 0:49
- 15 *III. Restless* 1:25
- 16 *IV. Uneasy* 1:24
- 17 *V. March-like* 1:38
- 18 *VI. Dreaming* 1:55
- 19 *VII. Gently Rocking* 1:11
- 20 *VIII. Passacaglia* 4:42
- 21 *IX. Slow and Quiet* 2:25

Total playing time: 52:33