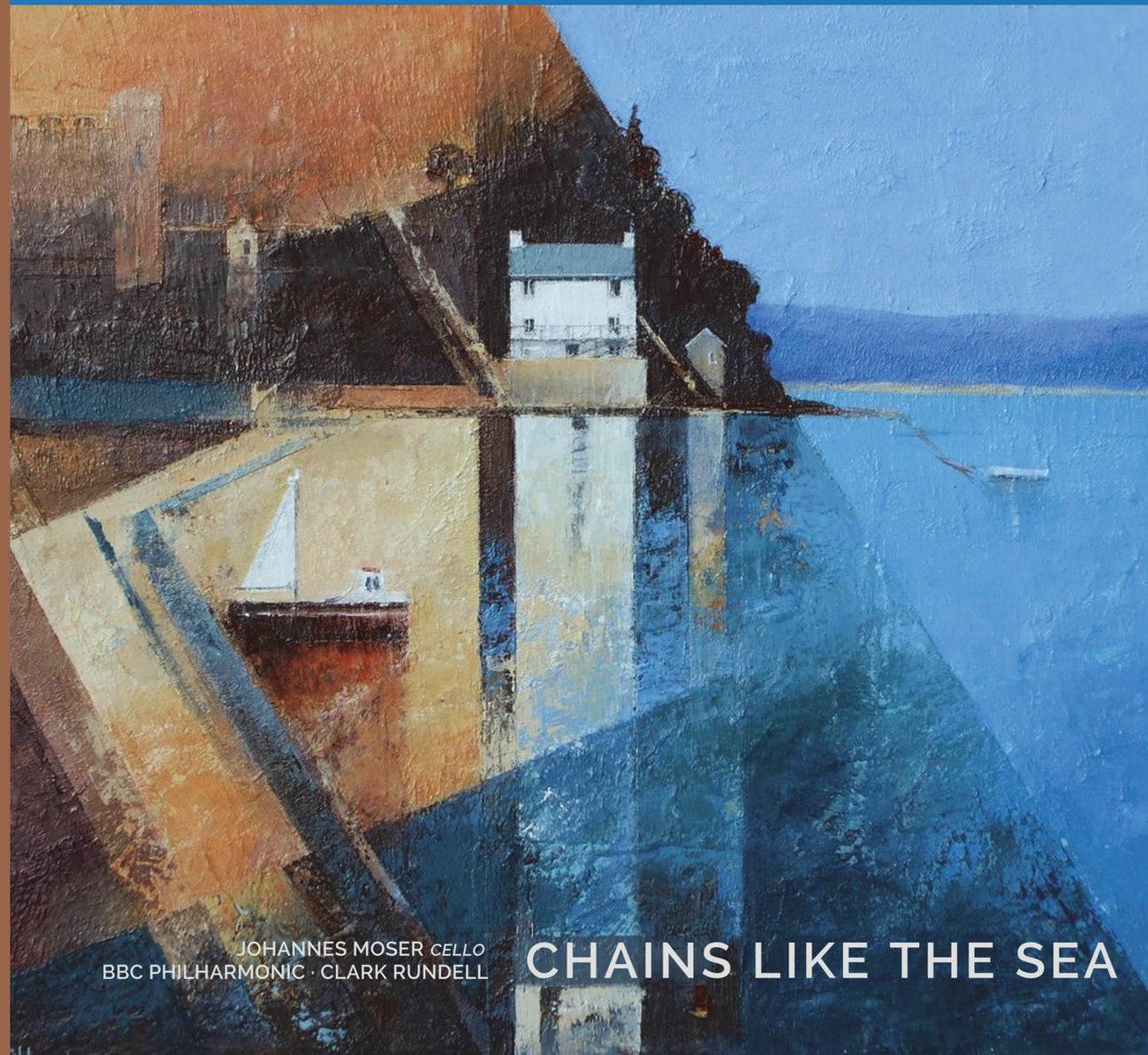
BERNARD RANDS



JOHANNES MOSER *CELLO*
BBC PHILHARMONIC · CLARK RUNDELL

CHAINS LIKE THE SEA

photo © Ted Gordon

BERNARD RANDS
CHAINS LIKE THE SEA

1	**Danza Petrificada** (2010)	10’31
	Cello Concerto (1996)*	
2	I For Slava	9’05
3	II Fantasia	6’53
4	III Canzone (from *Hiraeth*)	12’45
	Chains Like the Sea (2008)	
5	I ‘the Sabbath rang slowly’	10’20
6	II ‘rivers of the windfall light’	11’27

Johannes Moser *cello**
BBC Philharmonic • Clark Rundell *conductor*

Total timing 61’16

Johannes Moser appears courtesy of PENTAONE.

It is obvious to any listener, whether they be a connoisseur of new music or not, that Bernard Rands is a master craftsman. The directness of his musical language is matched by a brilliance of orchestration, which gives the work a refreshing immediacy. All the pieces on this album grab the listener from the very first note. They do not test the listener ('pace yourself this is going to take a while to get going') or try to disorient them with enigmatic fragments or impenetrable complexity. Instead they launch into a scintillating sound world which instantly defines a distinctive and colourful musical landscape, and then sweep the listener along in a logical argument, predominantly driven by line (melody). The music is constantly inventive and multi-layered, but the principal narrative is clear and easy to follow. This is music for everyone.

It was not always that way in Rands' music. When he came to prominence in the UK in the 1970s, he was seen as an ambassador for the European avant-garde. He counted Boulez and Berio among his influences and his friends. He had studied in Italy with Dallapiccola and Berio. He had spent two years in the USA on a Harkness Fellowship rubbing shoulders with experimental composers like Cage, Brown and Feldman. All those influences came through in his music, and back in the UK he also made contact with some of the most exciting free jazz musicians in London. Indeed, when he formed his contemporary music group Sonor in 1971, two of its members were the jazz bassist Barry Guy and trombonist Paul Rutherford. Commissioned frequently by Boulez and the BBC, his music was at the cutting edge of the new music revolution which was sweeping the fusty English tradition aside. Or so it seemed. Looking back now, after 40 years, Rands reveals in interview how important the music of Michael Tippett was to him then; not so much Britten, apparently, although he now has the highest respect for Britten's melodic genius. One would not have suspected it at the time.

Spirited away to the USA in 1975, Rands never returned to live in the UK. In America his music developed through a series of high-profile commissions and a seven-year residency with the Philadelphia Orchestra, working with Riccardo Muti. He has written for all the major orchestras in the USA and across the world. His understanding of the orchestra is without equal. By now there is nothing experimental about his technique; he is in complete command of the medium. Audiences and players alike can feel completely at home with the music he writes for them. Looking back, Rands has said that although he cannot identify any specific ways that his music has been influenced by living in the United States, he has felt liberated from the stylistic pressures which weigh down on composers in Europe. He has been able to follow his own muse.

The earliest piece on this album is the **Cello Concerto**, commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1996 and composed for the celebrated cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovitch to celebrate his 70th birthday. Rands formed a close relationship with Rostropovitch (Slava), and the central movement of this work – a transcription and development of the second movement of Rands' String Quartet no 2 – was in response to his admiration for that work. According to Rands: "*Apparently Slava had heard a performance of the quartet in Saint Petersburg, and he told me that he loved it and that 'it reminds me of my country'*."

Subtly informing the first and third movements of the concerto is the traditional Welsh folk song *Hiraeth*, somewhat veiled in the first movement and more overt in the third. The word 'hiraeth' connotes 'nostalgia' or 'deep longing for the homeland' – perhaps one of the emotions linking the composer (Rands studied in Wales, in Bangor, and learned to speak the Welsh language) and the great Russian master exiled from his home country in 1974.

Movement 1 of the Concerto begins with a powerful full orchestral passage made up of huge chordal blocks offset by firm bass pizzicati. Eventually the solo cello enters and extracts melodic lines from the preceding orchestral textures, creating a more soulful and reflective tone. The orchestra extends these lines into a melodic counterpoint in the wind and high strings leading to a moment of rest half way through the movement. At the restart, the keen eared listener may detect the slightest hint of the Elgar concerto, as the cello launches into a more animated and often tremolando line. The end comes suddenly as the full orchestra emphatically closes the cello down.

In the second movement, 'Fantasia', the cello and orchestra seem to inhabit separate musical worlds, the dotted rhythms of the

strings set against the cello's rhapsodic unfolding line. Ultimately the cello wins out when, as Rands puts it: "*the strings are seduced into sharing the cello's rhapsody, as if with a despondent 'too little, too late' response, and the cello sinks to its lowest depths to echo its murmurs of the movement's opening*".

'Canzone' (Song) is the title of the final movement, though the song in question is not Italian but Welsh. Here the song *Hiraeth* is presented with nine variations seamlessly woven into a single span. The opening, Rands says, comes closest to anything in the work resembling a cadenza. The cello maintains the rhapsodic mood of the second movement, exploring the theme in a manner somewhat analogous to an Indian musician's exploration of a raga, with ever accumulating elaboration and complexity. The final variation, slow and majestic, is marked 'Epilogue'.

The premiere performances of Cello Concerto were given by Rostropovich and the BSO conducted by Seiji Ozawa in Symphony Hall, Boston and then at Carnegie Hall, New York. After subsequent performances by Rostropovitch and others, Johannes Moser's first engagement with the Concerto was in March 2004 when he performed it with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Pierre Boulez.

There is another Welsh connection in ***Chains Like the Sea***, whose two movements bear the headings '*the Sabbath rang slowly…*' and '*rivers of the windfall light*' – all lines from the poem *Fern Hill* by Dylan Thomas, one of Rands's great heroes. Rands explains: "*Wales was a pretty dreary place on a Sunday. There was no drink, no sports, everything was closed, and you can imagine the young boy thinking that whilst all the other six days were full of lively fun, 'the sabbath rang slowly'*."

In the first movement of *Chains Like the Sea,* Rands rings these Sabbath bells at regular points in the score, first as a single harp note and then in increasing density of orchestration. These orchestrated 'chimes' give rise to varying orchestral resonances, sometimes static and dying away, and sometimes blossoming into melodic activity. In the shorter second movement, Rands responds to the 'rivers of windfall light' with gusts of orchestral activity, sometimes light and sometimes more powerful, scattering the musical ideas like autumn leaves. These poetic images go some way to explain the musical sound world, but when all is said and done this is abstract rather than programmatic music. There is a sensuous and playful quality which delights in its richness of harmonic and timbral invention, like Thomas's poem, and which effortlessly sweeps the listener along.

The most recent of the three pieces on this release is ***Danza Petrificada***, a virtuosic showpiece conjuring the sounds of Mexico. When Riccardo Muti took over at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 2010 he commissioned a work from Rands, stipulating that he would like the piece to pay tribute in some way to the centenary of the Mexican revolution.

For his title and inspiration, the composer turned to Mexico born Octavio Paz, and to his 1930 poem *Vistas Fijas* (*Scenic Views*) - specifically the third line which reads:

*[…] festín de formas, danza petrificada bajo las nubes que se hacen y se deshacen y no acaban de hacerse, siempre en tránsito hacia su forma venidera […]**

[…] a banquet of forms, a petrified dance under the clouds that make and unmake and never stop making themselves, always in transit toward their future form […]

This line, Rands notes, "*could be a wonderful description of the phenomenon of music itself*". In his 'petrified dance' Rands does not emulate Mexican music or borrow familiar tunes. Instead he weaves a sound world coloured by the persistent presence of rattling tambourines and other noise elements suggesting the ubiquitous percussion of Mexico (and the ever present cicadas of the Mexican night), and then highlights some of the rhythms of that country, condensing them into fragmentary accompanying figures which build to the rhythmic 'danza' of the closing passages. Even here, though, the dance is not obvious; *Danza Petrificada* is not a 'Mexican piece', but a 'banquet of forms … always in transit toward their future forms'.

The work was commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and funded by the Edward F. Schmidt Family Commissioning Fund. The premiere performance was on May 10, 2011, conducted by Muti, with subsequent performances that summer in five European cities during the CSO's European tour.

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**Octavio Paz's poems are published by New Directions Publishing*

Bernard Rands is a major composer with over one hundred published works and recordings. The originality and distinctive character of his music has been described as 'plangent lyricism' with a 'dramatic intensity' and a 'musicality and clarity of idea allied to a sophisticated and elegant technical mastery.'

His composition *Canti del Sole*, premiered by the New York Philharmonic, won the 1984 Pulitzer Prize in Music. His large orchestral suites *Le Tambourin*, won the 1986 Kennedy Center Freidheim Award. Conductors who have performed his music include Barenboim, Boulez, Eschenbach, Marriner, Maazel, Mehta, Muti, Ozawa, Rilling, Salonen, Sawallisch, Schiff, Schuller, Schwarz, Slatkin, von Dohnanyi and Zinman, with many of the world's great orchestras.

Rands' a cappella vocal work *Canti d'Amor*, recorded by Chanticleer, won a Grammy Award in 2000 and Boston Modern Orchestra Project's iconic recording of his *Canti Trilogy* for soprano, tenor, and bass with chamber ensembles was released to great critical acclaim. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Bernard Rands has been commissioned by many of the world's major orchestras, ensembles and soloists, including – to mark his 85th birthday – new works for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. His music is published exclusively worldwide by Schott Helicon Music Corporation.

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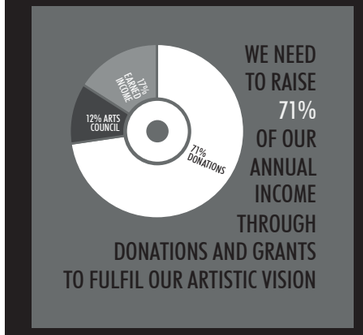

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