

KENNETH FUCHS

CHANDOS

SUPER AUDIO CD

**ORCHESTRAL
WORKS**
VOLUME 1

Cloud Slant

After Three Paintings
by Helen Frankenthaler

Quiet

in the Land

Pacific Visions

Solitary
the Thrush



ADAM WALKER *flute*

SINFONIA OF LONDON

JOHN WILSON



Dario Acosta Photography

Kenneth Fuchs

Kenneth Fuchs (b. 1956)

Orchestral Works, Volume 1

première recordings

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| | Cloud Slant (2020–21) | 18:57 |
| | after Three Paintings by Helen Frankenthaler | |
| | Concerto for Orchestra | |
| | For John Wilson and Sinfonia of London, in warm friendship | |
| 1 | I Blue Fall. Allegretto – Pesante –
Allegro deciso – A tempo [Andante cantabile] –
Andante cantabile, ma non troppo – | 6:33 |
| 2 | II Flood. Adagietto – Pesante – Poco maestoso –
Andante flessibile – | 7:01 |
| 3 | III Cloud Slant. Allegretto – Più mosso – Comodo – Pesante –
Vivo – Adagio flessibile – Vivo – Pesante | 5:23 |

4

Solitary the Thrush (2019–20)*

16:17

Concerto for C and Alto Flute and Orchestra
For Peg Luke, whose generous support made the
composition of this work possible

Solitary the thrush,
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
Sings by himself a song.
Song of the bleeding throat,
Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know,
If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die).

Walt Whitman, *Memories of President Lincoln*
'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd'

Adagietto (segui solista) – Poco più mosso – Allegro vivace –
Adagietto (segui solista) –
Allegro vivace –
Adagietto (segui solista)

5

Pacific Visions (2016)

8:18

in One Movement

for String Orchestra

Commissioned by Dennis and Suzanne Poulsen
and composed for Musique Sur La Mer Orchestras,
Long Beach, California

Allegro energico -

Cadenza, Larghetto -

Allegro scherzando -

Presto -

Prestissimo

6

Quiet in the Land (2017)

15:26

Poem for Orchestra

Composed for the Phoenix Symphony, with the generous support
of the Phoenix Symphony Commissioning Club

Adagietto flessibile – Molto moderato –

Allegro agitato – Poco maestoso – Allegro agitato –

Adagietto – Feroce – Molto moderato –

Allegro agitato – Allegro scorrevole (l'istesso tempo) –

Adagio flessibile – Poco agitato

TT 59:16

Adam Walker flute*

Sinfonia of London

John Mills leader

John Wilson



Adam Walker

Kenneth Fuchs:

Orchestral Works, Volume 1

Introduction

With an official work list reaching back fifty years, the Grammy-Award-winning Kenneth Fuchs (born 1956) is without doubt one of American music's leading orchestral composers. From the *Proclamatory Overture*, for wind band, of 1973, the earliest composition in his official catalogue, to the Concerto for Orchestra 'after three paintings by Helen Frankenthaler', *Cloud Slant* (2020–21) – written for this very recording – his orchestral output has grown and developed to encompass a wide range of genres, from overtures and tone poems to suites and concertos (ten to date, including ones for string quartet, electric guitar, and piano, the last entitled *Spiritualist*), inspired by a diverse range of subjects, testimony to his wide sympathies and fields of knowledge. His output includes chamber music (including five string quartets), solos and duos, vocal and choral music, and four chamber musicals.

Fuchs has composed six works inspired by paintings by Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011). He first encountered her work in 1983, while still a graduate student at the

Juilliard School, via a television documentary. He wrote to the artist and discovered a communicative near-neighbour and, more important, a kindred creative spirit. An invitation to an exhibition of her work in December that year resulted in a formative experience: it was where he first saw the painting *Out of the Dark*. Fuchs commented later:

I looked at the patch of raw canvas on the upper right corner with all the paint rushing toward that spot and instantly my creative instincts harmonized with the image. It was as if my own creative aesthetic was shown to me. I will never forget that moment.

One direct practical result was the composition of a triptych for chamber ensemble, *Out of the Dark*, which he wrote the following year. The conductor JoAnn Falletta – who has since become one of his most stalwart champions, recording five discs of his music – then commissioned Fuchs to adapt it as a chamber orchestral suite, which he completed in 1986; Falletta recorded it in 2003. Two further pieces came from that same year, *Fire, Ice and Summer Bronze* (after two works on paper), for brass quintet, and *Into*

October, another triptych, scored for piccolo trumpet, trumpet in C, flugelhorn, and organ. The Piano Concerto, *Spiritualist*, followed in 2016 and he has just completed *Light Year*, to feature in a future album.

Cloud Slant

The roots of *Cloud Slant* go back to the early 1990s, when Fuchs conceived the idea for a virtuoso orchestral concerto based on three more of Frankenthaler's canvasses: *Blue Fall* (1966), *Flood* (1967), and *Cloud Slant* (1968) – not just musical depictions of them but also his reactions to their artistic sweep and power. That they dated from successive years in the mid-1960s provided a unifying thread and he made some initial sketches of the music. However, the concerto did not come fully into focus until late in 2019 when the conductor John Wilson started planning this album of orchestral pieces, and Fuchs seized the chance to create something new from that long dormant project.

The concerto plays continuously, opening with a brightly scored 'aural frisson' (to borrow the composer's own description) for full orchestra, emulating the vivid cascade of blue into a gold-yellow base that is the most immediately striking feature of *Blue Fall*. Or rather two or three, as this opening gesture is immediately repeated after a brief general

pause, and again soon after, in shortened form, its vigour generating the main *Allegretto* section that follows. The depiction of *Blue Fall* falls into three sections, however, building like a toccata in alternating tempi and variable textures, sometimes fast-flowing torrents of notes rushing over the edge, as in the central *Allegro deciso* section, at others – particularly in the concluding *Andante cantabile, ma non troppo* – lyrical pools or meanders of sound that may represent the quieter outer edges of Frankenthaler's canvas, yet vital in holding in the bright, blue energy of the main image.

Colour is an essential part of Fuchs's use of a standard-sized ensemble: double woodwinds (but with all the usual 'extras', such as piccolo, English horn, high E flat and bass clarinets, an alto saxophone, and contrabassoon), four horns, trios of trumpets and trombones, tuba, timpani plus a quintet of percussionists, harp, piano, celesta, and strings. Yet the sound world that Fuchs conjures from his resources is greater than the sum of its parts. The orchestration focuses on orchestral sections rather than individual soloists, used to create washes of colour as backdrops to the principal thematic or harmonic progress of the music, nowhere more delicately laid out than at the start of the central section, 'Flood', in which the

sequence of expanding vibraphone chords provides a single point of reference for the listener while the accompanying harmonies shift among woodwinds, strings, and brass. The initial mood is very calm and light – as at the upper part of Frankenthaler's acrylic painting, all reds and pinks – but darkening as the eye is drawn down to the deeper, lower portion (green and dark blue) of the canvass. In Fuchs's score, this is signalled by an extended form of the opening 'aural frisson' of 'Blue Fall', which leads to a warmly scored passage for fast-moving strings, *Pesante*, a wonderful melody for the horn, and fanfare-like motifs for the trumpets. Once again, the final section is calmer and slower, *Andante flessibile*, led by strings, the woodwinds scudding above like eddies in a flood.

The bold, often frayed textures, in orange, brown, and dark blue – with at the very bottom edge, a hint of a mirror image – of Frankenthaler's *Cloud Slant* are utterly unlike any in *Blue Fall* and *Flood*. As a visual construct, it lies somewhere between them, sparer in texture but with greater, multi-dimensional movement from left to right as well as top to bottom. As a consequence, the finale is suffused with light and movement, a higher incidence of solos – especially for the woodwinds and brass just after the gentle opening gestures of the movement –

providing a varied aspect of the work's description as a concerto for orchestra. Overall, the music's demeanour of calm well-being is carried through from first bar to last in a flow as irresistible as a woodland stream.

Solitary the Thrush

Given that the flute was his primary instrument at high school, in the early 1970s (he played as a principal in the school orchestra and local wind bands and went on to play piccolo in the University of Miami's Wind Ensemble under the baton of the renowned Frederick Fennell), it was inevitable that Fuchs would compose a flute concerto. However, it was not until 2019 that he set about the task – for the flautist Peg Luke, to whom the concerto is dedicated – completing it the following January. As is customary of compositions by this composer, the concerto carries a descriptive title, *Solitary the Thrush*, a reference to lines from Whitman's elegy for Abraham Lincoln, 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd'. This was another essential, formative discovery, made while Fuchs was at the Juilliard School, as he recalls in the preface to the score of the concerto:

Whitman's masterwork struck me like a thunderbolt; the reclusive hermit thrush would someday become the inspiration for my eventual flute concerto.

Solitary the Thrush is cast in a single, free-flowing movement, but breaks down into four sections, the soloist alternating the regular instrument with the alto flute in G. In miniature, the structure takes cues from Whitman's poem, which moves from 'a meditation on grief toward a comprehension and acceptance of death'. Thus, after the rather cadenza-like opening, *Adagietto (segui solista)*, in which the solo flute emulates birdsong over a quiet, limpid accompaniment, the pace and textures slowly build up to a more volatile *Allegro vivace*. The pace then slows over a brief orchestral interlude, allowing the soloist to switch to the alto instrument, to the *Adagietto* second section in which a sense of loss is manifest, although not overstated. The restrained mood, though still luminous, is a reflection of the alto flute's slightly more burnished tone. The tempo switches again to *Allegro vivace* for the bright third section, dominated once more by the standard flute in an almost playful dialogue (relief at the acceptance of mortality, perhaps) with the orchestral sections before the alto returns once more, *Adagietto (segui solista)*, for the quiet coda.

Pacific Visions

Pacific Visions (2016) was composed as a concert opener at the request of the

Californian Musique Sur La Mer Orchestras, which gave the première on 17 March 2017, at the Aquarium of the Pacific, in Long Beach. It was an apt location, for Fuchs titled the piece after the then-new wing of the Aquarium, designed as an educational platform for the sustainability of the World Ocean. Scored for string orchestra, *Pacific Visions* is in a single, dynamic movement sub-divided into five sections, starting with driving *Allegro energico*. The second section, *Cadenza, Larghetto*, is more sparsely textured, individual instrumental sections taking it in turns to embellish its main idea, starting with the cellos, then violas and first violins. Little by little, the scoring thickens from the two violin sections, adding violas, cellos, and finally, double-basses. The ensuing *Allegro scherzando* livens up proceedings and the optimistic, open-hearted mood is maintained – with one or two *agitato* asides – to the end of the work, the tempo accelerating to an exhilarating *Presto*, then *Prestissimo*, completing a work that succeeds brilliantly wherever it is placed in a programme.

Quiet in the Land

The Poem for Orchestra, *Quiet in the Land*, is another work by Fuchs that started life in a different form. In 2003, inspired by the rolling prairie of the Midwestern United States and

the 'immense arching sky' under which it sits, Fuchs composed a pastoral 'idyll' for flute, English horn, clarinet, viola, and cello. It is based around a chorale-like theme heard in fragmentary form early on, and the intervals of a minor second, major and minor thirds, a fifth, and a minor seventh. The 'sub plot', as it were, of the piece is the impact of the Second Gulf War which had then recently broken out. As Fuchs wrote in the preface to the score:

I wondered how quiet the spirit of our land might be. I considered the thousands of families, friends, and loved ones of those involved in the war who sent messages of faith and hope through daily prayer, phone calls, e-mail messages, letters, and care packages.

The harmonic ambiguity of the score left the listener in little doubt of the unquiet human landscape lying just out of view (if not earshot). Fourteen years later, Fuchs revisited the work at another difficult period in United States history, recasting it in orchestral form. The overall structure may be similar but the lyrical nature of the original idyll – gentle alternations of chorale and polyphonic developments of the contrasting material – is dispelled in the later version by increasingly more passionate outbursts which stalk the chorale theme throughout its discourse. This change in expressive focus

is partly a consequence of the translation into orchestral form, which makes a wider instrumental palette available, and partly a response to the socio-political events of the times, all now close to home. The emotional distance of the original quintet, in which the fighting of a foreign war is echoed at one or two removes, has gone, replaced by music of more immediate impact.

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Praised by *The Guardian* for his 'breathtaking virtuosity', **Adam Walker** has firmly established himself at the forefront of a new generation of wind soloists. He studied with Gitte Sorensen at Chetham's School of Music and with Michael Cox at the Royal Academy of Music, graduating with distinction in 2009 and winning the HRH Princess Alice Prize for exemplary studentship. That year, at the age of twenty-one, he was appointed principal flute of the London Symphony Orchestra and received the Outstanding Young Artist Award at MIDEM Classique; in 2010 he won a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship and was shortlisted for the Young Artist Award of the Royal Philharmonic Society. He performs regularly as a soloist with the major UK orchestras, including the BBC Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony

Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Hallé, Ulster Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and further afield has appeared at the Grant Park Music Festival, in Chicago, and with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, Malmö Symfoniorkester, Wiener Kammer Orchester, and RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra.

A committed chamber musician with a curious and creative approach to repertoire, Adam Walker took up his place on the prestigious Bowers Program of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in 2018, touring with the Society both at Lincoln Center and across the United States for three seasons. Soon after, he launched the Orsino Ensemble, focusing on the repertoire for wind quintet. Recent highlights of his chamber music activities include appearances at LSO St Luke's, deSingel, in Antwerp, Musée du Louvre, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Alte Oper Frankfurt, and chamber music festivals in Utrecht, West Cork, Delft, and Moritzburg. He appears regularly at the Wigmore Hall, London, where he has recently collaborated with Brett Dean, Tabea Zimmermann, Cédric Tiberghien, Mahan Esfahani, Ailish Tynan, and Sean Shibe. Adam Walker was appointed professor at the Royal

College of Music in 2017 and the Hochschule der Künste Bern in 2022.

Sinfonia of London rose to fame in the 1950s as the leading recording orchestra of the day, appearing in the musical credits of more than 300 films, including the 1958 soundtrack by Bernard Herrmann for Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, and on countless gramophone records, among them Sir Colin Davis's first discs of Mozart symphonies and Sir John Barbirolli's celebrated recording of English string music. Relaunched in 2018 by the British conductor John Wilson, the orchestra brings together outstanding musicians who meet several times a year for specific projects. It includes a significant number of principals and leaders from orchestras based both in the UK and abroad, alongside notable soloists and members of distinguished chamber ensembles.

The orchestra's début recording, of Korngold's Symphony in F sharp (2019), received numerous five-star reviews, was nominated for a *Gramophone* Award, and won a 2020 *BBC Music Magazine* Award. *Escapes*, the orchestra's second release, was devoted to French orchestral works and chosen as Disc of the Month by *Gramophone*.

Respighi's Roman Trilogy (2020) garnered the orchestra its second *BBC Music Magazine*

Award. The magazine concluded: 'Wilson and his hand-picked band of musicians continue to strike gold with almost anything they turn their hands to.' *MusicWeb International* said: 'I have never heard this music presented with such power and detail and sheer visceral excitement but also with such control and sophisticated balance – it is literally revelatory. This might just be one of Chandos' finest feats of engineering ever, showcasing the superlative and sophisticated playing of John Wilson's Sinfonia of London. A genuine triumph.'

In 2021 Sinfonia of London made its live début at the BBC Proms and released two further recordings. *English Music for Strings* received a flurry of ecstatic reviews, *The Mail on Sunday* declaring it 'dazzling... some of the finest string playing ever put on disc by a British orchestra', and an album of works by Dutilleux was described by the *Financial Times* as 'bewitchingly played and imaginatively directed by Wilson', going on to win the performers a *BBC Music Magazine* Award for the third year in a row.

Further acclaimed releases since then have included a disc of orchestral works by Ravel, which received a *Gramophone* Award in 2022, the celebrated album *Metamorphosen*, featuring outstanding works for string orchestra by Strauss, Korngold,

and Schreker, a disc of music by John Ireland, *Hollywood Soundstage*, which celebrates the golden age of Hollywood, and a recording of Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 3, the first in a Rachmaninoff cycle by this orchestra and conductor, and a second disc of British works for strings.

In 2022, Sinfonia of London returned to the BBC Proms, *The Arts Desk* stating that 'John Wilson's handpicked super-orchestra is quite simply the most exciting thing currently happening on the British orchestral scene'. The orchestra undertook its first UK tour in autumn 2022, to exceptional acclaim, *The Telegraph* declaring that Sinfonia of London 'is set fair to become Britain's favourite orchestra'. www.sinfoniaoflondon.com

Born in Gateshead, and since 2011 a Fellow of the Royal College of Music where he studied composition and conducting, **John Wilson** is now in demand at the highest level across the globe, regularly guest conducting the world's finest orchestras. In recent seasons these have included the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, and Sydney

Symphony Orchestra. He has also conducted productions at English National Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera. For many years he appeared across the UK and abroad with the John Wilson Orchestra and in 2018 relaunched Sinfonia of London with which he has recorded several award-winning CDs, their wide repertoire ranging from Respighi to Britten and Dutilleux. In 2021 he brought the orchestra to the BBC Proms for their much-anticipated début concert performance, described by *The Guardian* as 'truly outstanding'. In 2022 they appeared at the second night of the Proms in a concert of English music.

John Wilson has amassed a large and varied discography, his most recent recordings with Sinfonia of London having

received exceptional acclaim. The disc devoted to Respighi's Roman Trilogy won the 'Orchestral' category at the 2021 *BBC Music Magazine Awards*, the renditions described by *The Observer* as 'Massive, audacious and vividly played'. Referring to one of the musicians' most recent discs, the *Financial Times* praised the contents as 'bewitchingly played and imaginatively directed by Wilson... This disc of early works by the fastidious French composer Henri Dutilleux succeeds beyond expectation'. It duly won a 2022 *BBC Music Magazine Award*. In March 2019 John Wilson received the prestigious Distinguished Musician Award of the Incorporated Society of Musicians for his services to music and in 2021 was appointed Henry Wood Chair of Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music.

John Wilson and Sinfonia of London, at Symphony Hall, Birmingham,
26 November 2022



Fazioli F 228 Grand Piano (serial no. 282 275) courtesy of Jaques Samuel Pianos Ltd, London
Piano technician: Paul Hirsh

FAZIOLI

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UConn

GLOBAL

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Sound engineers Ralph Couzens (Pacific Visions) and Jonathan Cooper (other works)

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