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# Michael Berkeley

## Selected Reviews

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### *Insects*

#### **Snape Maltings (WP April 2023)**

“The world premiere was Michael Berkeley’s *Haiku 2: Insects*, a set of six harpsichord pieces written for Esfahani, and each a vivid little virtuoso sketch depicting the movements of a different insect – erratically skittering around the keyboards for The Fly, pugnacious and insistent for The Maybug, and so on. There was also Berkeley’s Snake from 2012, a cor anglais solo, which was preceded by the composer himself reading the DH Lawrence poem that inspired it.” – **Andrew Clements, *The Guardian* \*\*\*\*\***

### *Winter Fragments (Chamber Music Recording)*

#### **Resonus Classics RES10223 (September 2018)**

“Stylistically ranging from the plainchant-inspired *Clarinet Quintet* (1983) to the sensuous and Satie-like *Seven* (2007), to the jostling intensity of *Catch Me If You Can* (1994), it shows Berkeley at his exploratory and individualistic best, free to follow his instinct, tonal or expressionistic” – **Fiona Maddocks, *The Guardian***

“Even when working with large-scale forces such as opera and music theatre, Michael Berkeley’s style and expression remain attuned to the more intimate nuances of chamber music. Perhaps this is because the chamber context provides such an effective vehicle for one of his music’s most distinctive features - the often dichotomous interplay between the individual and the group... the Berkeley Ensemble, directed by Dominic Grier, are excellent throughout - entirely at one with the music of their namesake composer” – **Pwyl ap Sion, *Gramophone***

“There’s contrast aplenty – *Catch Me If You Can* (1994) a feisty, frenetic triptych, the gentle, self-echoing, harp-centred *Seven* (2007) pregnant with a pensiveness that collides late Mahler with Satie at his most subdued. The *Clarinet Quintet* (1983) is spun from sinewy, twisting strands contrasting the playful impetuosity and dark-hued luminosity of John Slack’s clarinet to end in a moment of sublimely subdued beauty. 2010’s Rilke-setting *Sonnet for Orpheus* and the seven-part song-cycle *Winter Fragments* (1996) – both benefiting from Fleur Barron’s ardent mezzo – showcase Berkeley’s sensitivity to text, economy of expression and ability to surprise with startling drama or an unexpected flourish” – **Michael Quinn, *ClassicalEar.co.uk***

### *Coronach*

#### **Presteigne Festival (WP August 2018)**

“Arresting...a guttural eruption of grief meets the pure lament of tears” – **Rebecca Franks, *The Times***

### *Haiku*

#### **Clare Hammond, Presteigne Festival (WP August 2016)**

“Michael Berkeley’s *Haiku* took the form of a series of sharply etched vignettes inspired by the contrasting movement of various birds encountered in the Welsh Marches. Astutely arranged, these glinting shards of material juxtaposed darting, hyperactive explosions of sound with more measured activity, ominously loitering” – **Musical Opinion**

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### ***Clarion Call: Music for Septet and Octet* Berkeley Ensemble, Resonus Classics (March 2014)**

“Insistence is a lasting quality of Berkeley’s music, and you find it here in the nagging memorability of the opening call as well as the subtly redirected energy of the gallop” - **Peter Quantrill, *Gramophone Magazine***

“Michael Berkeley’s *Clarion Call and Gallop* is crisp, incisive and high-spirited” - **Fiona Maddocks, *The Guardian***

“*Clarion Call* is the title of their latest offering and its contents are a delight [...] Michael Berkeley’s vivacious and witty *Clarion Call and Gallop* (2013)” - ***Classical Ear***

“The disc opens with the newest work, Michael Berkeley’s 2013 *Clarion Call and Gallop* for septet which was written specially for the Berkeley Ensemble... A high spirited and buoyant piece, it has a very distinctive texture with much high clarinet writing against spikier textures from the other instruments with the whole having a lovely transparency and airiness, combined with a very strong character.” - ***Planet Hugill***

### ***Into the Ravine* Carducci Quartet, Signum Classics CD (February 2014)**

“Michael Berkeley’s finely wrought *Oboe Quartet* (2012) – a single movement spanning 18 minutes – is texturally transparent and plangent in expression” - **Edward Bhesania, *The Strad***

“A study in the varied colours available from the oboe and string quartet, reaching an intense, unified climax”  
- **Anthony Burton, *BBC Music Magazine***

### ***Organ Concerto* BBC Proms / Jac van Steen**

“Heralded by a bell, its opening is perfectly suited to the Proms, with three trumpeters interlacing chromatically from different parts of the auditorium, suggesting an enchanted garden of sounds” - **Michael Church, *The Independent***

“Off-stage trumpets joined the soloist David Goode in making their mark in Michael Berkeley’s arresting *Organ Concerto* – an Easter journey from darkness to light, receiving its London premiere after 24 years. Cerebral, sometimes belligerent, though lightened with lyrical flights and delicate colours, it resounded splendidly through the Albert Hall” - **Geoff Brown, *The Times***

“Berkeley has described the piece’s origins in liturgical rituals, specifically those connected with Easter, and also in his own experiences as a chorister. But what immediately impresses about the result is the score’s sense of propulsion, which rarely lets up, and its regular use of striking material, right from the dramatic opening gesture in which three solo trumpets, positioned around the building, sound a deliberately unsynchronised chant-like motif. Benefiting from the impact of Lutosławski, Berkeley’s imaginative orchestration holds the attention throughout the 20-minute span, throwing up strong ideas and keeping them in interactive play”  
- **George Hall, *The Guardian***

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“The BBC National Orchestra of Wales played splendidly for the quietly masterful Jac van Steen. The player, David Goode, was soloist in the belated London premiere of Michael Berkeley's 1987 *Organ Concerto*, an imaginative single-span work occupied with the meaning of Easter and deploying peripatetic trumpeters to symbolise Pentecostal fire. The way they fitted with the unclichéé, undomineering organ writing and the freely shifting, Lutosławski-ish orchestral textures into an acoustic blend was satisfying”  
- **Paul Driver, *Sunday Times***

“The brass high in the Gallery at the start of Michael Berkeley's *Organ Concerto* heralded a revitalised BBCNOW. The huge and open space of the Royal Albert Hall was ideal for the striking opening to this magnificent work. Surprisingly, this was its first London performance; yet it dates from 1987, employs standard winds plus percussion and strings, so why it isn't performed more often is an enigma” - **Chris Caspell, *Classical Source***

### ***Rilke Sonnets*** **Nash Ensemble & Claire Booth**

“The second highlight was provided by Michael Berkeley's settings of three Rilke poems, sung by the soprano Claire Booth. Surprisingly expressionistic and densely variegated, Berkeley's detailed and inventive score fizzed in frequent and sustained collision with the emotional charge of Rilke's verse” – **Guy Damann, *The Guardian***

“Berkeley's brightly-coloured work sounded like a new-minted classic” – **Michael Church, *The Independent***

### ***For You*** **Music Theatre Wales**

“Michael Berkeley and Ian McEwan's new opera deals frankly with themes of age and ego, obsession and suspicion...It's a tangled web worthy of Pinter, and Berkeley's palette switches smoothly between the first scene's knotted "lust for newness" to the vibes, harp, strings and horns which evoke the wife's frailty” – ***The Independent***

“...it bristles with wit and lyricism, while giving other composers and librettists a lesson in how to drape operatic tradition in modern clothes...” – ***Financial Times***

“Berkeley's third opera (2008) is a brilliant, dark psycho-comedy...The music, conducted here by Michael Rafferty, is energetic, deftly coloured and carefully balanced, allowing the excellent voices to make their due mark” – ***The Sunday Times***

“...the skilful MTW ensemble honours Berkeley's rich orchestral invention” – ***The Observer***

“Berkeley's score is lively, abrasive and strongly crafted...” – ***The Daily Telegraph***

“it gains in considerable range and depth as it goes, tapping into the libretto's edgy humour and finding a bittersweet lyricism that gets below the skin of these troubled characters...” – ***Gramophone Magazine***

“Berkeley's highly organic yet tightly structured score... For You is a welcome addition to the operatic repertoire and deserves repeated performances. This superb recording should go some way to ensuring that happens.” – ***International Record Review***