



Press Release

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Huw Watkins appointed Composer in the House at the Orchestra of the Swan

Huw Watkins, one of the UK's most admired musicians – both as a composer and pianist – will join forces with Stafford-upon-Avon based **Orchestra of the Swan** as part of an imaginative scheme which aims to re-establish composers at the heart of orchestral life.

Composer in the House was created by the **Royal Philharmonic Society** and **PRS for Music Foundation** in 2005. The scheme enables composers and performers alike to have space to create new work, and seeks to engage audiences more actively with new music through long-term involvement with a composer.

To date, the Royal Philharmonic Society and PRS for Music Foundation have supported a 'Composer in the House' at three UK orchestras – Stephen McNeff at the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Kenneth Hesketh at the RLPO and Anna Meredith at *sinfonia ViVA*. Each pairing has found different ways to weave the composer into the creative fabric of the organisation through commissioning, performing existing works, curating, learning and participation, audience development, online marketing and by bringing a human face to new music.

Huw Watkins has built a strong reputation with a body of distinctive orchestral, chamber and vocal works. A recent winner of the vocal category at the 2011 British Composer Awards, he will work with Orchestra of the Swan for a period of two years from 2012. As well as writing new works for the orchestra (including a major commission in Spring 2013, and pieces for community and concert performance), Huw is at the heart of a new partnership between the orchestra and composition students at the Royal College of Music (where he teaches) with performances of short works by five young composers. His considerable skills as a pianist will also be heard on the concert platform and in community performances.

Orchestra of the Swan is a major champion of new music; its recent Spring Sounds 2011 festival included four world premieres, two recordings, visiting composers, soloists and conductors from the USA and a joint commission with the American Composers' Orchestra. Previously the orchestra has commissioned work from Joe Cutler, Tansy Davies, Joe Duddell, Alexander Goehr, John Joubert, Joanna Lee, Roxanna Panufnik, Paul Patterson, Joseph Phibbs, Julian Philips, Dobrinka Tabakova, Param Vir, Errollyn Wallen, Shu Wang, John Woolrich and many others

Orchestra of the Swan is resident at the Civic Hall in Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon, Associate Ensemble at Town Hall, Birmingham and has other residencies and concert series at Cadogan Hall London, Bedworth Civic Hall, Loughborough Town Hall and tours to venues and festivals throughout England and Wales. OOTS Associate Artists have been Tasmin Little, Julian Lloyd Webber and for 2011-12 the outstanding young pianist Benjamin Grosvenor. The orchestra's community programme is extensive and imaginative and includes a wide range of projects in Stratford-upon-Avon, Rural Warwickshire and inner city Birmingham in partnership with Symphony Hall.

Vanessa Reed, Executive Director, PRS for Music Foundation and Rosemary Johnson, Executive Director of the Royal Philharmonic Society said: *"We are delighted that Orchestra of the Swan and Huw Watkins have responded so positively to working with us on this initiative. Composer in the House provides real opportunities for long-term creative exchange between the composer, orchestra member and audiences that we see as an essential development of 21st century orchestral repertoire. The RPS / PRSF partnership is committed to developing wider opportunities for composers."*

David Curtis, Artistic Director of Orchestra of the Swan comments:

"We are absolutely delighted that Orchestra of the Swan has been selected to receive this highly prestigious RPS/PRS award. The Composer-in-the-House award recognizes OOTS' long-term commitment to commissioning and performing new music, placing contemporary composers at the heart of the concert programme."

Huw Watkins is an outstanding musician and a composer we have been hoping to commission for some time. His appointment as our Composer-in-the-House from 2012-14 will create extremely exciting and innovative opportunities for Orchestra of the Swan, Huw, our partners in schools and at the Royal College of Music and of course, our audiences. We will all be embarking on an extremely exciting musical journey over the next two years."

Huw Watkins comments:

"I am thrilled to be starting this relationship with the vibrant and enterprising Orchestra of the Swan. I look forward to getting stuck in with the orchestra and involving myself with them in many ways, both as composer and pianist. I share David Curtis's desire to bring new music to as wide an audience as possible, and am hugely grateful to the RPS/PRS for giving us this opportunity to do so."

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Notes:

Biography - Huw Watkins

Huw Watkins was born in Wales in 1976 and studied piano with Peter Lawson at Chetham's School of Music and composition with Robin Holloway, Alexander Goehr and Julian Anderson at Cambridge and the Royal College of Music. He was awarded the RCM's Constant and Kit Lambert Junior Fellowship in 2001 and now teaches composition there.

Watkins's breakthrough came in 1999 when the Nash Ensemble premiered his Sonata for cello and eight instruments. In 2000 the BBC National Orchestra of Wales premiered Sinfonietta under Grant Llewellyn and subsequently commissioned his Piano Concerto that was premiered in 2002 with the composer at the piano. This wider attention led to commissions from the London Symphony Orchestra, London Concerto, to mark their centenary in 2005 and a Double Concerto premiered by Philip Dukes (viola), Josephine Knight (cello) at the Proms with BBC NOW conducted by Jac van Steen. He also received his first US commission from the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra that resulted in Nocturne for horn and chamber orchestra. His most recent orchestral work was a Violin Concerto for Alina Ibragimova, commissioned at her request by the BBC and premiered during the 2010 BBC Proms by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Edward Gardner. The work has been shortlisted for the 2011 British Composer Awards and further performances are already planned for the 12/13 season.

Watkins' orchestral profile continues to rise with the announcement that he will be the next RPS/PRS for Music Foundation 'Composer in the House' from 2012-14. This position will see him resident with Orchestra of the Swan in Stratford for two seasons during which time he will write new works, perform with the orchestra, take part in education projects and curate a series of concerts as part of the Spring Sounds Festival in conjunction with the orchestra's artistic director.

Alongside this growing body of orchestral music is a wealth of chamber music which complements Watkins' parallel career as a pianist. He has written two string quartets (for the Belcea and Petersen Quartets) as well as a number of works for artists with whom he has developed performing partnerships including his Cello Sonata for Paul Watkins (recorded on Nimbus) and a viola Fantasy for Lawrence Power. The Nash Ensemble have long been supporters of his music: his latest work for them was a Horn Trio and the group has recorded a CD of chamber music which will be released by NMC in spring 2012. His Piano Trio was commissioned by Vernon Ellis for The Florestan Trio, who have performed it widely.

Watkins is also building a body of vocal works, which includes In My Craft or Sullen Art (Goodison Quartet No. 4) for tenor and string quartet which Mark Padmore and the Petersen Quartet premiered at the Wigmore Hall in 2006; Three Auden Songs, commissioned at Mark Padmore's request by La Monnaie in 2009; and Five Larkin Songs, premiered by Carolyn Sampson and the composer at the 2010 Ludlow Festival, and also shortlisted in the 2011 British Composer Awards. 2009 also saw the premiere of his first chamber opera, Crime Fiction, with a libretto by David Harsent for Music Theatre Wales where he is Jerwood Associate Composer. He is currently writing a second opera for Music Theatre Wales, a co-commission with Scottish Opera to be premiered at the 2012 Edinburgh International Festival and toured throughout the UK thereafter.

On the concert platform he has premiered works by Mark-Anthony Turnage, John Woolrich and Michael Zev Gordon and has performed concertos with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra of the Swan. He recently presented a programme of Hans Werner Henze's piano works at the BBC's Total Immersion day at the Barbican. He is the Britten Sinfonia's resident pianist. His recordings include a disc of contemporary British music for violin and piano for Usk and the piano cycle Symmetry Disorders Reach by Alexander Goehr for Wergo. He was Featured Composer at the 2009 Presteigne Festival of Music and the Arts, and Composer in Residence at both the 2011 Heimbach Festival (at the invitation of Lars Vogt) and Nürnberg Festival.

Most recently, Watkins was named winner of the Vocal Award at the 2011 British Composer Awards for Five Larkin Songs for soprano and piano that he premiered with Carolyn Sampson at the 2010

Weekend of English Song in Ludlow.

About Royal Philharmonic Society

The Royal Philharmonic Society [RPS] is a charity dedicated to creating a future for music through the encouragement of creativity, the promotion of understanding and the recognition of excellence.

To mark the achievements of distinguished practitioners across the industry the Society presents the annual RPS Music Awards, the UK's leading awards for live music; the Leslie Boosey Award, for those who have made an outstanding contribution to further contemporary music in the UK, often in a 'back stage' capacity – from programmers to publishers; the newly launched Salomon Prize, for orchestral musicians (with the inaugural award recently presented to Hallé double bass player Beatrice Schirmer); Honorary Membership of the Royal Philharmonic Society, for services to music and which has been awarded to composers, conductors, performers, patrons, commentators programmers and educationalists; and the society's highest honour, the RPS Gold Medal. Current recipients of the RPS Gold Medal are: Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Janet Baker, Bernard Haitink, Alfred Brendel, Colin Davis, Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, Simon Rattle, Plácido Domingo, Claudio Abbado, Daniel Barenboim, Henri Dutilleux and Thomas Quasthoff.

The Society's artistic activities focus on composers and young musicians and through a programme of audience development, awards and lectures it seeks to raise the public consciousness of the finest music making today and to create a forum for debate about the direction of classical music.

The RPS celebrates its bicentenary in 2013. It was formed on 24 January 1813 with the aim 'to promote the performance, in the most perfect manner possible of the best and most approved instrumental music', which it did principally by giving regular public orchestral concerts in London, including through two world wars.

www.royalphilharmonicsociety.org.uk

About the PRS for Music Foundation

PRS for Music Foundation is the UK's largest independent funder of new music across all genres. Widely respected as an adventurous and proactive funding body, PRS for Music Foundation supports an exceptional range of new music activity by awarding grants and leading partnership programmes that support music sector development. PRS for Music Foundation also motivates public debate about creative music-making through ground-breaking projects such as the New Music Award. Last year the Foundation celebrated 10 years of supporting pioneering musical activity. Over that time PRS for Music Foundation has given more than £13.5 million to over 4,000 new music initiatives.

www.prsformusicfoundation.com