



CONVIVIUM  
RECORDS

Martin Cousin

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# FANTASIAS FOR PIANO

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Kenneth Leighton  
Lawrence Rose  
Sergei Rachmaninov  
& Manuel de Falla

## Tracklist

### **Kenneth Leighton Fantasia Contrappuntistica, Opus 24 (1956)**

<b>1</b>	<b>i</b>	Maestoso ed un poco liberamente. . . . .	<b>1.35</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>ii</b>	Toccata: Allegro molto e ritmico. . . . .	<b>3.21</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>iii</b>	Chorale: Lento sostenuto . . . . .	<b>3.24</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>iv</b>	Fuga I: Allegretto con moto . . . . .	<b>2.53</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>v</b>	Fuga II: Presto e gaio - Primo tempo . . . . .	<b>2.24</b>

### **Lawrence Rose Piano Fantasia, Opus 24 (2018)**

<b>6</b>	<b>i</b>	Andante . . . . .	<b>3.26</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>ii</b>	Allegro . . . . .	<b>2.24</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>iii</b>	Largo . . . . .	<b>4.13</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>iv</b>	Allegro . . . . .	<b>4.44</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>v</b>	Adagio . . . . .	<b>4.10</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>vi</b>	Allegro - andante - allegro - maestoso . . . . .	<b>3.55</b>

### **Sergei Rachmaninov Morceaux de Fantaisie Opus 3 (1892)**

<b>12</b>	<b>i</b>	Elégie in E flat minor . . . . .	<b>5.44</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>ii</b>	Prélude in C sharp minor . . . . .	<b>3.56</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>iii</b>	Mélodie in E major . . . . .	<b>4.42</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>iv</b>	Polichinelle in F sharp minor . . . . .	<b>3.22</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>v</b>	Sérénade in B flat minor . . . . .	<b>4.14</b>

### **Manuel de Falla**

<b>17</b>	<b>Fantasia Baetica (1919)</b> . . . . .	<b>15.20</b>
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<b>Total Running Time</b> . . . . .	<b>73.49</b>
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## Programme Note

The fantasia as a genre progressed through several often bewildering changes in emphasis as musical history unfolded; so much so that it is difficult to attempt to define it in short and simple terms but broadly speaking: In the sixteenth century, fantasias were frequently composed for solo instruments, particularly the lute, and were improvisatory and virtuosic in character. In the seventeenth century particularly, fantasias were prevalent for ensembles or keyboard instruments. Bach's fantasias usually preceded a fugue but the improvisatory and virtuosic character was maintained.

By the 1700s imitative counterpoint tended to yield to flights of fancy and keyboard fantasias largely replaced ensemble pieces. Later the Romantics emphasised formal expansion but without the constraints of rigid sonata form, for example piano fantasias by Schumann and Schubert.

Modern composers have adapted the fantasia into a more extended instrumental scale or into elaborate orchestral writings including pieces for strings alone, for example Vaughan Williams and Tippett, or have looked back and incorporated certain features from the past.

But overall and in general, the term "fantasia" suggests (per *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*) "an ingenious and imaginative instrumental composition, often characterised by distortion, exaggeration and elusiveness resulting from its departure from current stylistic and structural norms" - in short, a precedence of imagination over conventional styles and forms.

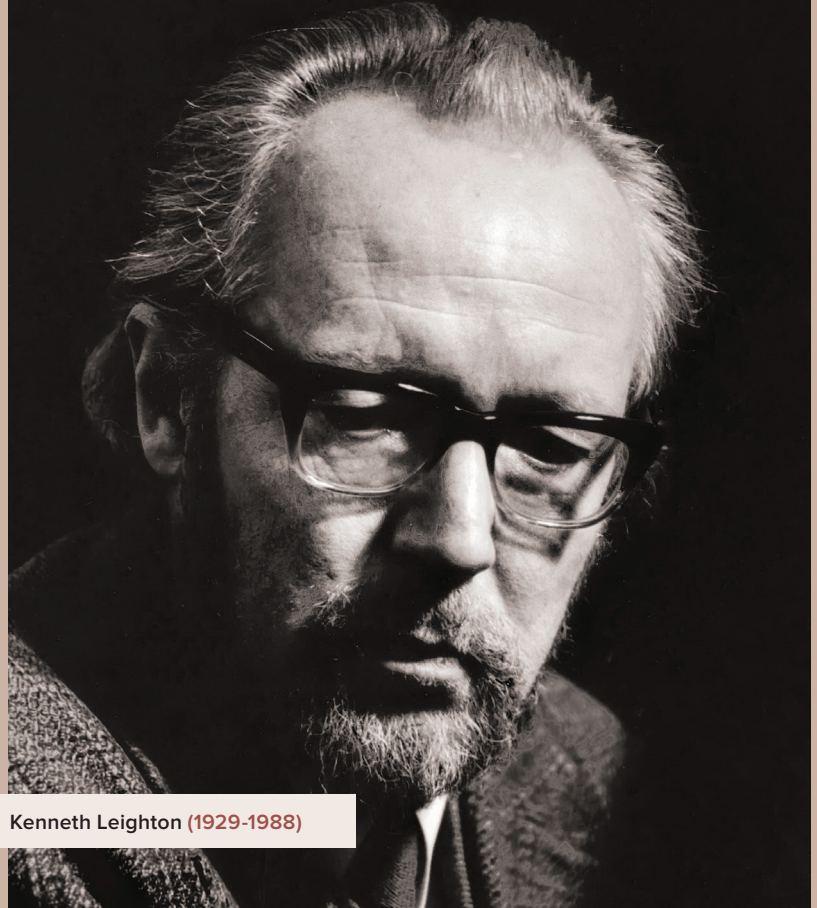
The four fantasias included on this CD were composed from the nineteenth century to the present day but are representative of key elements from the development of the genre as a whole.

## Programme Note

**Kenneth Leighton** (1929 - 88) born in Wakefield, England. From an early age, life as a chorister instilled into Leighton a deep spirituality and a love for church music. Study in Rome in 1951-2 helped him develop a natural lyricism couched in contemporary techniques and age-old counterpoint. His ultimate output was to include much church and choral music, chamber and instrumental music, and large-scale orchestral pieces. He was a fine pianist and he also taught in various academic institutions. Leighton acknowledged many influences especially Palestrina, Bach, Brahms, and Finzi. His spirituality was the fount of a continual search for meaning in life and the order of the universe, and for a balance between emotion and intellect, content and style. This balancing act is clearly demonstrated by ***Fantasia Contrappuntistica, Opus 24***, composed in 1956 and described as a homage to Bach. This piece won the Busoni prize for Leighton. It has five continuous sections but all are characterised by rhythm, often with irregular, constantly

changing time signatures and by passages involving ascending or descending intervals of a perfect fourth. **i** a short *maestoso* introduction marked “*un poco liberamente*” where imitative counterpoint prevails; **ii** a brilliant *toccata* marked “*allegro molto e ritmico*,” the latter direction entailing frequent irregular time signatures, the whole culminating in a transition; **iii** a *chorale* marked “*lento sostenuto, la melodia molto in rilievo*”; **iv** *fuga 1* marked “*allegretto con moto*”; and **v** *fuga 2* marked “*presto e gaio*” which again includes several irregular time signatures, shares common rhythmic elements with *fuga 1* and references the chorale, again marked “*in rilievo*”. The final five bars recall the opening *maestoso* section. (The marking *in rilievo* is intended to show that the chorale melody is to be emphasised.)

There is clearly a rigorous intellect at work in this amazing piece but not at the expense of lyricism or emotion. Whilst assuredly of its time it unapologetically looks back to the sort of fantasias being composed during or before the time of Bach.



**Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988)**

## Programme Note

**Lawrence Rose** (1943 - ) born in England. Rose studied violin from an early age and very soon developed an enthusiasm for composition, leading to the creation of some juvenilia. Other factors intervened, however, and Rose pursued a career in law. This did not completely prevent music studies and composing, and some seeds for later completed works were sown. Rose left the law in 2001 and took up composition apace. He has since completed thirty-one pieces, most of them after emigrating to Chicago.

Some are large-scale works, including five symphonies, three violin concertos, a concerto for orchestra and a piece for double string orchestra. There is a body of chamber music including five string quartets, a piano quartet, a clarinet trio, a brass quintet, a string trio, a cello sonata and a violin sonata. As an antidote to Covid isolation he also completed a short work for two solo cellos in 2020. Performances of some of his chamber music have taken place in England. Rose has also completed "*The Glory and the Dream*" for soprano

and orchestra, "*Whimsical Profundities*", a song cycle for bass-baritone and chamber ensemble and "*Missa pro Pace*" for double choir, organ and piano.

**Piano Fantasia, Opus 24** composed in 2018 and dedicated to Martin Cousin. Rose has made it clear that this more or less continuous six-movement fantasia is an example of imagination taking precedence over conventional styles and forms. While certain forms may be detected (for example, the third movement is a theme with four variations and each movement ends with a distinctive cadence which is always slightly or in one instance, considerably, varied) it was more a question for him of following where the music led. Additionally, Rose describes the work as a set of untitled character pieces and prefers to leave it to the individual performer and/or listener to decide for him or herself what characteristic(s) each piece may display.

Some characteristics of a more technical nature: the whole is largely chromatic with many changes of key and therefore somewhat unsettling and elusive; some



Lawrence Rose (b. 1943)

## Programme Note

rhythmic or melodic fragments can be detected as recurring in various places throughout; there are frequent and sudden changes of dynamic and towards the end of the final movement the cadence reappears in the right hand, unharmonised but is not final as, after a few more bars in crescendo, it returns (this time in 4/4) extended into a glorious peroration amidst bell-like sonorities.


**Sergei Rachmaninov** (1873 - 1943) born in Oneg, displayed an early musical talent and in spite of paternal intentions for the military he eventually ended up at the Moscow Conservatory where he graduated in 1892 as winner of the Great Gold Medal. He had met and become greatly impressed by Tchaikovsky and was to benefit from his mentorship. He was also to gain a strong reputation as a composer, pianist and conductor in Moscow. Indeed, Rachmaninov is now recognised as being one of the greatest of pianists doubtless aided by his exceptionally large hands, each capable of spanning some twelve

inches and possibly by his likely affliction with Marfan Syndrome, a hereditary disorder of the connective tissue which may actually have contributed to his great flexibility. Another great pianist, Cyril Smith described Rachmaninov as having hands “like octopus tentacles.”

### ***Morceaux de Fantaisie Opus 3***

(complete 1892 version.) Rachmaninov had just graduated from the Moscow Conservatory, aged nineteen, when he composed this work and dedicated it to his composition teacher, Arensky. It was to display characteristics which became even more marked as he matured – yearning melancholy and drama. His complete understanding and mastery of his instrument is evident in his idiomatic writing for it. He was not concerned with detailed form (hence the titular reference to “Fantaisie”); indeed, all but the final piece are in simple ternary form. (While he did produce revised versions of *Mélodie* and *Sérénade* in 1940 it is the complete original version which is recorded here.)

❖ *Élégie*. The opening moderato is



**Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)**

## Programme Note

clearly elegiac in tone but with occasional impassioned outbursts. The central *piu vivo* suggests anxiety and disquiet but an *appassionato* passage leads back to the opening section which culminates in an almost angry outburst.

**ii *Prélude*.** This was to become Rachmaninov's most famous piece much in demand in his recital tours, so much so that he grew almost to hate it! The extreme dynamic markings range from *ppp* to *ffff*. While the central section is marked *agitato* and refers obliquely to the *dies irae* plainchant, the opening and closing sections are contrastingly dramatic *lentos*, both grave and almost funereal.

**iii *Mélodie*.** This piece with its opening *adagio sostenuto* is the only one of the five to be wholly in major keys. Clearly, melody is to the fore being at first reflective and written for the left hand, then more agitated (*piu mosso-agitato*) and chromatic and then reflective again, this time in the right hand.


**iv *Polichinelle*.** Marked *allegro vivace*

at the start, the music for this *commedia dell'arte* character is first mercurial, impulsive and hyperactive, then, in spite of being marked *agitato* in the middle section, somewhat calmer. He is not to be constrained for long and is back to his former antics in the final section.

**v *Sérénade*.** For this last piece Rachmaninov abandons ternary form and resorts to a *sostenuto* introduction hinting at the waltz melody to follow in the main *Tempo di Valse*. This piece is a little elusive in that its affinity to traditional serenades is not easy to pinpoint other than referencing its lighthearted playfulness.

This early work contains hints of Rachmaninov's later outpourings and it may not be a stretch to discern similarities later to be found in some of his mature orchestral works.

**Manuel de Falla** (1876 -1946) born in Cadiz. One of de Falla's teachers encouraged a study of Spain's folk music and of its composers of the baroque period and



Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)

## Programme Note

this had a huge influence in moulding Spain's finest nationalist composer/pianist of the twentieth century. De Falla moved to Paris in 1907 where he was befriended by Debussy, Ravel and Dukas and met Stravinsky. On his return to Madrid in 1914 he began to cultivate his Andalusian period which was followed from 1920 by his mature drier and more incisive period. 1921 saw him move to Granada where he helped organise a festival of the traditional cante jondo of Andalusia. Franco and the civil war ultimately forced him into permanent exile in Argentina.

***Fantasia Baetica*** was composed in 1919 for its dedicatee, Artur Rubenstein while de Falla was still in Madrid. Baetica is the old Roman name for Andalusia and the piece is a celebration of Andalusian culture especially flamenco, (with its origins in North Africa or possibly India) and cante jondo (profound and dramatic singing). The music is all original but highly evocative of southern Spanish folk music, song and dance. This type

of music did not favour melody but was more concerned with short, simple, repetitive rhythmic phrases. The piano writing here is not idiomatic and caused problems for Rubenstein who only played it a few times before casting it aside as too difficult and too long. The piece has a harsh percussive quality with strange-sounding scales, wide-ranging glissandi and guitar-like figurations and effects. Modal usage and de Falla's exotic eastern interests colour its harmonic language but its melodic range is, almost by definition, limited, even during the central *intermezzo*, marked *andantino*. Rather, there is constant repetition, typical of Spanish song and dance but as compensation the entire range of the piano comes into play. Fortunately for us, (because it is captivating, wildly impassioned and exciting,) *Fantasia Baetica* has been taken up by other concert pianists in spite of its difficulties.

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## Biography

### Martin Cousin

Martin Cousin is now regarded as one of the most exceptional pianists of his generation, having been awarded 1st prize at the 2005 Ettore Pozzoli International Piano Competition (Seregno, Italy) and Gold Medal at the 2003 Royal Over-Seas League Music Competition (London). Martin has appeared regularly in the major British musical venues since graduating from the Royal College of Music, making his London solo debut at the Purcell Room in 1998. Numerous solo recitals followed, most notably at the Wigmore Hall in 2001, 2005, and 2011 and he has appeared as concerto soloist with the London Philharmonic, Halle, Royal Philharmonic, Philharmonia and BBC Concert Orchestras. Performances further afield have included tours of New Zealand, Italy, the US and concerts in Stockholm, Brussels, Toronto, Berne and The Hague.

2006 saw the release of his debut CD, *Rachmaninov Piano Sonata No.1 and Morceaux de Salon* with SOMM Recordings, which was selected as Classical CD of the week by the *Daily Telegraph*.

The US magazine *Fanfare* added, "This is the performance of the 1st Sonata that I have always heard in my head but never thought I'd actually get to hear with my ears. This guy's the Real Deal!"

His second CD for SOMM, featuring Glazunov's piano sonatas, was released in 2010 to great acclaim, with Gramophone stating that the new release is 'in every way, an impressive disc.'

His disc of Rachmaninov's *Etudes-Tableaux* was released in 2014 and was proclaimed 'a landmark recording' by the *Observer* with a 5-star review. *Classical Source* added, 'This is one of the best solo piano records I have heard for a very long time – the more so considering it faces some pretty

## Biography

severe competition in the catalogues. Those who do not know these extraordinarily original masterpieces are strongly advised to acquire this disc. There is none better’.

*Fanfare Magazine* proclaimed, ‘Based on the present disc and on the towering performance of the First Sonata on his debut CD, I am prepared to state that Cousin is among the most distinguished Rachmaninoff pianists of our generation.’

2 discs of Rubinstein’s piano music were released by Naxos in 2023, gaining 5 stars in *MUSICA Magazine*, 5 tuning forks from *Diapason* and 4 stars from *Ritmo Magazine*.

Following this, 2 discs of Liszt’s solo piano transcriptions were also released by Naxos in 2024, gaining 5 stars from *Ritmo magazine* - ‘to be able to play Liszt’s piano music you have to be as virtuosic as he was, a requirement at which Martin Cousin excels’ and *American Record Guide* remarking that

‘Cousin’s voice shines like a jewel’.

Martin will record the final 2 discs in Naxos’ series of Scarlatti’s complete piano music in 2024/25, for release in 2025/26.

Martin is a member of the Aquinas Piano Trio and chamber music has taken him to places such as Prague, Tokyo, Indonesia, Thailand, Zimbabwe and Barbados.

Martin’s hands were featured on the big screen in the Oscar-winning film *Shine*, for the scenes involving Rachmaninov’s 3rd Concerto.

[www.martincousin.com](http://www.martincousin.com)

This album was recorded at Menuhin Hall, Stoke d’Abernon, Surrey, UK

**M**  
**Menuhin**  
**Hall**





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# FANTASIAS FOR PIANO

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## Pianist

Martin Cousin

## Recorded

Menuhin Hall, Stoke d'Abernon, Surrey, UK on 15, 16 and 17 December 2023  
(Recorded on a Steinway Model D Concert Grand Piano)

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Lawrence Rose photograph by Nicole Thomas  
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