

Ensemble 10:10
April 26 programme notes

Clark Rundell

Conductor [Clark Rundell](#) is well known to Ensemble 10:10 audiences. With a repertoire spanning centuries, continents and styles, he has established himself as a champion of music ranging from the 18th Century to the current day, from jazz to Kora, tango to European modernism and from large, multidimensional projects to music of complexity and intricacy. He works regularly with orchestras and ensembles including all the BBC Orchestras, Britten Symphonia and Royal Northern Sinfonia as well as the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and, of course, Ensemble 10:10.

Deeply committed to new music, he has given world premieres of works by composers such as Steve Reich, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Django Bates, James MacMillan, Tansy Davies, Gary Carpenter, Grace Evangeline Mason, Julia Wolfe, Wayne Shorter and Gwilym Simcock. He has also conducted extensive orchestral projects with artists including Elvis Costello, Abel Selaocoe, Toumani Diabate and Tim Garland, and as a highly versatile musician has performed with artists like John Dankworth, Cleo Laine, Andy Sheppard and Victor Mendoza.

Rundell is passionate about working with young people and is Professor of Conducting at the [Royal Northern College of Music](#). He studied conducting at Northwestern University in Chicago with John Paynter and trombone with Frank Crisafulli and was subsequently awarded a Junior Fellowship to study conducting with Timothy Reynish at the RNCM.

Apollo Saxophone Quartet*

The groundbreaking [Apollo Saxophone Quartet](#) celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, and it remains at the forefront of the UK classical music scene with a reputation for excellence and versatility. The Manchester-based group has without a doubt made the largest single contribution to the repertoire for saxophone quartet in the country, commissioning and premiering [more than 100 new works](#), many of which are now considered core repertoire and are performed by saxophone quartets worldwide. This includes significant works from Sir Richard Rodney Bennett, Michael Torke, Michael Nyman, Graham Fitkin, Django Bates, Barbara Thompson and Joby Talbot to name but a few. It has also collaborated with a diverse range of artists including Torke, Bates, the Shobna Jeyasingh Dance Company, poet Lemn Sissay and pianist Joanna MacGregor.

Bow Out, the first of the group's eight CDs, was released in 1992, followed by the 1994 record *First & Foremost* which was recorded at Abbey Road and reached the top three in the classical charts. In 2015 the group marked its 30th anniversary by appearing at the 17th World Saxophone Congress in Strasbourg, and a world premiere of a new quartet by Luke Bedford commissioned by the Lake District Summer Music Festival. The group performs regularly at UK festivals and has presented many world premieres. It is also renowned for its many innovative projects and for touring widely with high energy recital programmes. Its members are [Rob Buckland](#), [Carl Raven](#), [Andy Scott](#) and Jim Fieldhouse.

Nikolai Kapustin *Concerto for Eleven Instruments*

The late Ukrainian-born composer [Nikolai Kapustin](#) discovered jazz as a teenager in the 1950s and studied piano at the Moscow Conservatory, graduating in 1961. Early in his career he gained a reputation as a jazz pianist and arranger, and had his own quintet as well as playing in other

ensembles like Juri Saulski's Big Band and later in the 1970s joining Boris Karimashev's orchestra.

But Kapustin always considered himself a composer first and foremost, and he had his breakthrough in 1957 with his *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra*. He often utilised jazz structures and elements within classical forms, and in 1980 he was admitted into the Union of Russian Composers.

The 'Eleven Instruments' within his concerto of the same name comprise of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, French horn, piano, two violins, viola, cello and double bass. The work in three movements was written in 1988 for the Bolshoi Theatre although at that time it was structured as a double quintet. But after composing the opening allegro, Kapustin was asked to add a piano to the piece. This is why the instrument doesn't feature until the start of the second movement. The concerto's first and longest movement is a winding, jazz-infused interplay between instruments, introduced in the winds before migrating through the strings and developing into an insistent, pulsating rhythmic dance. An exquisite and melodious laid back andantino opens with piano and strings, later joined by winds, taking it in turns to develop the unfolding melody. And the piece concludes in a distinctive jazz mood with a lively, capering allegro molto.

Carmel Smickersgill *Charcoal*

[Carmel Smickersgill](#) is a Manchester-based composer working predominantly within electronic DIY, classical and theatre music. She studied composition with Gary Carpenter at the Royal Northern College of Music, and is now an associate member there.

She released her debut LP [We Get What We Get and We Don't Get Upset](#) in 2022. She was a 2021 recipient of the Jerwood Live Art Award and a 2020 nominee for the Ivor Novello Rising Star Award. Smickersgill has performed her own music on Elizabeth Alker's Northern Drift Radio 3 show as well as supporting Anna Meredith on her 2021 UK tour and at the Barbican. She also performs with other artists, with mostly backing vocals, live electronics, guitar and keys. Her music is played regularly on *BBC Radio 6* and *Radio 3*.

Outside of electronic music she has written concert hall commissions for ensembles including Manchester Camerata, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Das Neue Ensemble, Laura Bowler, Galvanize Ensemble, Equilibrium Quartet and more. She is also part of the group Bothy.

Smickersgill won the [2018 Christopher Brooks Composition Prize](#) (now the Rushworth Prize) as part of which she was commissioned to compose a new work, with *Charcoal* given its world premiere by Ensemble 10:10 in November 2019. Describing the work, the composer explains: "*Charcoal* is inspired by the idea of staring into a fire and zooming closer and closer into the flame. At the start you can hear a very literal crackling from the percussion as well as the serenity you experience from gazing at a distant fire. As the piece progresses you move past playful sparks and gentle moments of fluid seeming flame before finding the dramatic violence and joyful explosions of the fire's heart. It's a terraced zoom in on a seemingly calm scene."

Howard Skempton *Ballade**

Chester-born, Birkenhead School-educated composer, pianist and accordionist [Howard Skempton](#) is an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Music and a lecturer in composition at the Birmingham Conservatoire. He started composing at 20, studying with Cornelius Cardew with whom he and Michael Parsons formed the [Scratch Orchestra](#) to perform experimental contemporary music.

A prolific composer and renowned for the distinctive clarity of [his musical language](#), one of his best-known works is *Lento* (1990) which was commissioned by the BBC for the BBC Symphony Orchestra and performed at the 2010 Proms. Skempton's string quartet, *Tendrills*, written for the 2004 Huddersfield Festival, won the Royal Philharmonic Society award for chamber-scale composition and the Chamber Music category at *the BBC Radio 3 British Composer Awards*. *The Moon is Flashing* won the 2008 vocal category. Meanwhile his work *Only the Sound Remains*, a large-scale piece for viola and chamber orchestra, was shortlisted for the 2011 Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards.

Ballade for saxophone quartet and string orchestra was composed in 1997 as a commission for the Norfolk & Norwich Festival. The Chopin-esque title was suggested by the lyrical character of the opening tune. This contrasts with chromatic, chorale-like material, which is spacious and contemplative.

Steve Reich *Pulse*

New York-born [Steve Reich](#) has been called 'the most original musical thinker of our time' (*The New Yorker*) and 'among the greatest composers of the century' (*The New York Times*). Starting in the 1960s, his pieces *It's Gonna Rain*, *Drumming*, *Music for 18 Musicians*, *Tehillim*, *Different Trains* and many others helped shift the aesthetic centre of musical composition worldwide away from extreme complexity and towards rethinking pulsation and tonal attraction in new ways. He continues to influence younger generations of composers and mainstream musicians and artists all over the world. Among many awards and accolades, *Double Sextet* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2009 while *Different Trains*, *Music for 18 Musicians* and an album of his percussion works have all earned [Grammy Awards](#).

Pulse, composed in 2015 and premiered at Carnegie Hall in January 2016, is scored for winds, strings, piano and electric bass and has been described as 'simple and luminous' and having 'gorgeous instrumental textures'. Reich himself notes the work was composed in part as a reaction to his *Quartet* of 2013 "in which I changed keys more frequently than in any previous work. In *Pulse* I felt the need to stay put harmonically and spin out smoother wind and string melodic lines in canon over a constant pulse in the electric bass and/or piano. From time to time this constant pulse is accented differently through changing hand alternation patterns on the piano. All in all, a calmer, more contemplative piece lasting about 16 minutes. As is well known, composing is primarily a solitary activity. However, after completing *Pulse*, I sought out suggestions for improving it from Maggie Heskin, my editor at Boosey & Hawkes. She offered several ideas which helped motivate me to find my solution of hand alternation patterns mentioned above."

Graham Fitkin *Plan B**

Award-winning Cornish composer, pianist and conductor [Graham Fitkin](#) composes for live performance, recordings, dance, media and installations, and works with acoustic and electronic instruments and audio recordings. His work is generally described as minimalist, tonal and complex. He has had commissions from orchestras including the Halle, BBC Philharmonic, Tokyo Symphony, BBC Symphony, Athens Camerata and RSNO, and chamber music collaborations with Yo-Yo Ma (a *Cello Concerto* performed at the BBC Proms), the Sacconi Quartet, Kathryn Stott, Powerplant, Will Gregory, Ensemble Bash and Piano Circus. As a performer he directs the nine-piece Fitkin Band and performs with harpist Ruth Wall as Fitkinwall. Fitkin was Composer in Residence with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra between 1994 and 1996.

Plan B, for saxophone quartet and string orchestra, dates from 1999 and was commissioned by the Apollo Quartet (at the same time as Skempton's *Ballade*). Fitkin writes: "The situation might be as follows. A successful end result is incredibly important. The emphasis on achieving a result could not be greater. The process of getting there is tense. It is littered with potentially disastrous problems. There can be no admission of this. Failure is not permitted. As the process continues the sense of urgency grows. What degree of forced compromise is necessary to break a deadlock? What if the end result is not achieved? That is not a possibility. The end result must be achieved. But what if there is no breakthrough – what is Plan B? Plan B? There is no Plan B."