

BRITISH COMPOSERS OF PIANO CONCERTOS

Composers who have written more than one piano concerto

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1. William Sterndale Bennett

The most prolific composer of British piano concertos is probably William Sterndale Bennett with six to his name.

1 in D minor Op 1 1832, 2 in E flat Op 4 1835, 3 in C minor Op 19 1836, 4 in F minor Op 39 1839, 5 in F minor, allegedly 1836 and number 6 in A minor according to some sources. Both of these last two are without opus numbers or reliable dates.

Bennett was born in Sheffield on 13 April 1816 and orphaned when very young and brought up by his grandparents. He sang in the choir at King's College, Cambridge and enrolled at RAM at the age of ten where he was to stay for ten years. His Symphony no 1 attracted the attention of Mendelssohn. In 1836, Bennett went to Leipzig to study with Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann who dedicated his Symphonic Studies to Bennett.

Mendelssohn conducted Bennett's Piano Concerto no 3 with the composer at the piano in Leipzig. In 1837, Bennett began to teach at RAM having returned to London making it his permanent home although he made several trips to Leipzig between 1838 and 1842. He introduced the first cricket match in Germany.

He began to teach at RAM from 1837. He also taught at Queen's College, London. Pupils included Sullivan, Parry and Matthay. He became a director of the Philharmonic Society in 1842 sorting out their finances. The conductor from 1846-1854 was Michael Costa with whom Bennett did not get on.

Bennett married Mary Ann Wood (1824-1862) in 1844 and they had a son Robert (1847 -1928) who wrote a biography of his father.

Sterndale Bennett became the Principal of RAM from 1866 until his death. His workload ever increased. He gave the London premiere of Mendelssohn's Symphony no 3 in A minor (Scottish). He was a fine composer, excellent teacher and conductor.

He was a very important figure in music. He was knighted in 1871 and died on 1 February 1875 in St John's Wood. He is buried in Westminster Abbey near the tomb of Henry Purcell.

He composed a lot of piano music, choral works, at least two symphonies and chamber works. He was very adept performing in piano trios by Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Schumann.

Charles Villiers Stanford was a keen enthusiast of Bennett speaking of the refinement in his music.

2. Malcolm Williamson

There are four piano concertos by this composer

1 in A minor 1958

2 in F sharp minor for piano and strings 1960

3 in E flat 1962

4 in D 1964

He was born in Sydney, Australia on 21 November 1931. His father was an Anglican priest.

In 1950, Malcolm Williamson moved to London.

On the death of Sir Arthur Bliss in 1975, the post of Master of the Queen's Music came up and, to everyone's surprise, Williamson received this appointment. He was the first non-Briton to have this post.

One of his finest works of this period was the Mass of Christ the King of 1978.

But he failed to complete the Jubilee Symphony for the Silver Jubilee of the Queen.

He married an American, Dolores Daniel, and they had a son and two daughters, but that marriage broke up because of Williamson's many affairs with both sexes. Eventually, he had a deep affair with the publisher, Simon Campion. A series of strokes made him wheelchair bound and he died on 2 March 2003. No one from the Royal Family attended his funeral.

It is sad to report that he was a most troubled man and disliked.

He wrote ten operas, seven symphonies, several cassation or mini operas, six ballets and who will ever forget that controversial Organ Concerto.

His style seems to be hybrid with an attempt to evolve some modern ideas.

3. Stanley Bate

There are five concertos

1 withdrawn in 1934

2 Op26 1940 commissioned by Sir Henry Wood

3 Op66 premiered at a Prom in August 195

4 no reliable details known, circa 1955

5 no reliable details known, circa 1958

Bate was born near Plymouth on 12 December 1911 and was the organist at Plymouth Methodist Church. At the age of 12, the following year, he crossed the Tamar to Torpoint Methodist where he was the organist. He composed stacks of music in his early years. Someone has said he wrote 20 operas ! When he went up to RCM, he took volumes of his works with him.

He studied with Ralph Vaughan Williams, Arthur Benjamin, R O Morris and Gordon Jacob. In 1935, he won the Ernest Farrar prize and the following year the W W Cobbett prize. In 1934, he had disowned his Piano Concerto no 1.

Nadia Boulanger gave him some lessons and thought highly of him. He had some lessons with Hindemith in Berlin but he did not find these two teachers very profitable.

Bate married the Australian composer, Peggy Glanville Hicks (1912-1990), and they travelled to many places and stayed in a top apartment in New York for a while. In 1949, they returned to Britain. In 1954 they travelled to the USA, Brazil and Hanover.

The marriage ended in divorce in 1949 and Bate's second wife was the Brazilian diplomat, Margarida Guedes.

Bate was gay so his marriages would not be successful. Glanville-Hicks was also gay and would dress as a man.

It is such a pity when sexual orientation so affect peoples lives. Bate was found dead in his bed in October 1959 and it was said to be suicide. Others opined that it was alcoholism or a drug overdose.

Bate was an unashamed neo-romantic and much of his music is of quality.

4. York Bowen

His music belongs to a previous century and, by the 1920s, his music was out of fashion.

There are four piano concertos.

1 in E flat Op11 1903

2 in D minor Concertstück Op 17 1903

3 Fantasia in G minor Op23 1907

4 in A minor Op 88 1929.

Edwin York Bowen was born in Crouch End, London on 20 February 1884. His father owned the whisky distillers company of Bowen and McKechnie.

He studied at the Northern Metropolitan College of Music and the Blackheath College of Music before going up to RAM to study with Frederick Corder for composition and Tobias Matthay for piano. He became a professor of music there at the age of 25.

In 1912. he married Sylvia Dalton and their son, Philip, was born in 1913.

York Bowen made the first British recording of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no 4 and premiered Walton's Sinfonia Concertante in 1928.

He was supported by Sorabji which is a total surprise and Bowen dedicated his 24 Preludes to him. After Britten, Sorabji was the most despicable and unpleasant man I have ever met.

Bowen wrote a lot of music and also played the viola and the horn.

There are six piano sonatas, two viola sonatas, four symphonies, violin concerto, viola concerto 1925, horn concerto 1955, 3 three quartets etc.

There is much to admire in his music but the Piano Concerto no 4 meanders somewhat.

He died suddenly on 23 November 1961.

5. Sir Charles Villiers Stanford

He wrote three piano concertos

1 in G Op 59

2. in C minor Op 125

3 in E flat Op 171 unfinished.

There is an early discounted concerto in B flat.

He was born in Dublin on 30 December 1852 and, eventually, became professor of music at Cambridge. At the recommendation of Sterndale Bennet, he had gone to Leipzig to study with Carl Reinecke in 1874, but Reinecke hated all modern music, and so Stanford studied with Friedrich Kiel.

Stanford was as complete a musician as anyone could be, a brilliant teacher, an exceptional composer and a superb conductor. He was with the Leeds Triennial Festival for years. He composed 11 operas, 7 symphonies, 6 Irish Rhapsodies, the first has a ravishing rendering of Londonderry Air, choral works and motets, all music of character. He was not liked because he was Irish and was blatantly truthful.

There is the story of the letter he wrote to Elgar,

I am sitting in the smallest room in the house with your cello concerto before me but soon it will be behind me.

He died on 29 March 1924

6. Alun Hoddinott

He wrote three piano concertos

1 for piano, wind and percussion Op15 1959

2 Op 21 1960

3 Op 44 1966.

He also wrote 13 piano sonatas, ten symphonies, five string quartets, two clarinet concertos and concertos for cello, oboe, harp, organ, horn, orchestra, trumpet and percussion.

He was a child prodigy violinist and a founding member of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales, studied at University College Cardiff, becoming a lecturer there and professor in 1967. He established the Cardiff Festival of 20th century music with John Ogden.

He was always seeking for a personal style from late romanticism to serialism which discipline he could not master. Somewhat like Elgar he did not seem comfortable in writing allegros.

He died on 11 March 2008.

7. George Lloyd

He composed four piano concertos

George Walter Selwyn Lloyd was born in St Ives, Cornwall on 23 June 1913. Because of a rheumatoid condition, he was educated at home. His father, William, was an Italian opera aficionado.

George studied the violin with Albert Sammons and composition with Frank Kitson and Harry Farjeon. He was a student at Trinity College, London and a bandsman during World War 2. Later, with his father, he set up the New English Opera Company.

George married Nancy in 1937.

In 1942, his ship, the HMS Trinidad, had one of its torpedoes misfire and hit the ship. Many of the crew drowned in ship oil. Lloyd suffered severe mental and physical shock and was ill with shakings and heart trouble for the rest of his life. Initially, he could not compose for about four years.

He was an outspoken man hating modern music with some spite, and his own music was said to be regressive and hopelessly out of date.

He composed 12 symphonies, three operas. two violin concertos. a cello concerto and much more.

He died on 3 July 1998.

8. William Mathias

He wrote three piano concertos

1. Op 2 1955
2. Op 13 1961
3. Op 40 1968.

He was born in Whitland, Carmathenshire on 1 November 1936 and began piano lessons at the age of five and became a child prodigy. He went up to the University of Wales in 1952 and received first class honours in BMus in 1956, followed by an open scholarship to RAM 1956 -58.

He had two terms of study with the excellent Peter Katin, our finest concert pianist.

Mathias married Margaret Yvonne Collins on 17 September 1959. He was lecturer in music at University College of North Wales in Bangor from 1959 and senior lecturer in composition in Edinburgh 1968-9 before returning to Bangor in 1970 where he stayed until he retired in 1988.

He was an optimistic composer with music often full of rhythmic interest and life. Some of his organ music is very fine, lively and highly commended.

He wrote 4 symphonies, the fourth was unfinished, there is a clarinet concerto, an organ concerto and, in 1992, a concerto for flute and one for violin. His choral work, This World's Joie, is very good. Much of his excellent choral music is in the Anglican tradition. The Piano Concerto no 3, as played by Katin, is a gem.

Latterly, he apparently suffered from heart trouble and he died on 29 July 1992.

9. Sir James Loy Macmillan

He has composed three piano concertos

1. The Berseking 1990
2. 2003
3. Mysteries of Light, premiered 2011.

I can never understand why concertos need titles.

MacMillan was born in North Ayrshire at a place called Kilwinning on 16 July 1959. He studied composition at Edinburgh University and with John Casken at Durham University. An early success was with the orchestral work, The Confessions of Isobel Gowdie, given at a Prom in 1990.

He is the associate conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and has written four symphonies, concertos for viola, violin, oboe and cello, a Mass (2000), two cello sonatas and a concerto for clarinet called Ninian.

He has made a name for himself and has been honoured with a knighthood.

10. Kenneth Leighton

Because there is a piano concerto no 3 it is assumed that there are three concertos but only number 1 Op 11 and number 3 Op 57 are listed.

Leighton was a very good man, private, down to earth and not proud. He was born into modest circumstances in Wakefield on 2 October 1928. He was a chorister in Wakefield Cathedral.

In 1940, he joined the Queen Elisabeth Grammar School.

In 1946, he wrote his two original piano sonatinas and was awarded a LRAM while still at school.

He went to Queen's College, Oxford to study classics and music with Bernard Rose and received his BMus with honours in 1951. He was encouraged and befriended by Gerald Finzi and introduced to Vaughan Williams who admired his work.

In 1951, he was awarded the Mendelssohn Scholarship and went to Rome to study with Petrassi where he met his first wife, Lydia Angela Vignapiano, and they had two children, Angela and Robert.

He was appointed lecturer in music in Edinburgh and, in 1968, moved to Oxford University to succeed Rubbra. He wrote many splendid works including three symphonies, two fine string

quartets concertos for violin, viola, oboe and cello, the stunning Fantasia Contrappuntistica Op 24 for piano, a piano quartet, masses, choral and organ works.

His second wife was Josephine Anne Prescott who he married in 1981.

He died on 24 August 1988 of oesophageal cancer and was buried in Arran.

11. John McCabe

He wrote three numbered concertos

1. 1966

2 Sinfonia Concertante 1970

3 Dialogues 1977.

In addition, there is a concerto for piano and wind quintet of 1969.

He was born at Huyton, Liverpool on 21 April 1939. In an accident as a child, he was badly burned and taught at home. He then attended Liverpool Institute but, by the age of 11, he had written 13 symphonies! He studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music with Pitfield and Genzmer.

John came to recognition with his Concerto for orchestra of 1982.

He was an outstanding pianist and brought the Haydn piano sonatas to the world's attention. He premiered the piano concerto of John Corigliano. He wrote informative articles about Haydn, Bartok, Rachmaninov and Rawsthorne.

He married Monica Smith in 1974.

He wrote seven symphonies between 1965 and 2007 and the Six Minute Symphony of 1997. There are several concertos... for violin, a concerto funebre for viola, a horn concerto, a flute concerto, a cello concerto and one for trumpet. There is a piano sonata, Homage to Tippett, seven string quartets, choral music and impressive organ music as well as music for band.

He died after a long illness of brain cancer on 13 February 2013.

12. Iain Hamilton

There are two piano concertos

1 1967

2. 1987-8

Iain Ellis Hamilton was born in Glasgow on 6 June 1922 and apprenticed to be an engineer but then studied at RCM from 1947. He moved to the USA in 1962 but died in London on 21 July 2000. He developed a very personal style and his music was difficult but he later went back to a more acceptable style with his last two symphonies.

He wrote three piano sonatas, four symphonies, four quartets and eleven operas, all of which were initially highly successful. There are concertos for clarinet, organ, violin and harp and sonatas for clarinet, oboe, viola and two for cello.

His music is not in favour at this time mainly because of its Herculean difficulty and the prejudice by those who are shallow with remarks that music must have tunes. He still suffers injustice.

13. William Alwyn

There are two piano concertos to his name

1. 1930

2. 1960.

He was born in Northampton on 7 November 1905. He studied flute and composition at RCM and was a virtuosic flautist sometimes playing with the LSO. He was a polygot, poet and artist and became a professor of music at RAM (1926-1955). He was involved with the Performing Rights Society and copyright issues, and, at one time, was on the BBC panel reading new scores. For a time, he was the Vice President of SPNM, the Society for the Promotion of New Music, although he was not in favour of 'modern' music. His own music is somewhat conservative.

He composed over 70 film scores, five symphonies, three quartets and four stage works. Among his successful works is the Twelve Preludes for piano of 1958.

He was awarded the CBE in 1978.

The American actor, Gary Cooper, was a cousin on his mother's side,

He was married to the composer Doreen Carwithen (1922-2003), his second wife.

He died at Southwold, Suffolk on 11 September 1985.

14. Humphrey Searle

There are two piano concertos

1. Op 5 1944 Colin Horsely

2. Op 27 1956 Gordon Watson, of exceptional difficulty

There is also the Concertante Op 24 for piano, strings and percussion

Searle was born in Oxford on 26 August 1915, went to Winchester School in 1928 and six years later heard Berg's Wozzeck. He studied with Webern 1937-8 in Vienna and, in 1946, after sterling work in WW2, began to teach Walton, a fact ignored by many.

Humphrey was the expert on Liszt and on piano music and wrote a book about Liszt and promoted his work which was then unfashionable. Searle's piano works, the Ballade Op 10 and the Sonata Op 21 are works of the finest order and his Poem for 22 solo strings Op18 is remarkably beautiful and

was written for his wife Margaret Gillian Lesley Gray whom he married in 1949. She died on Christmas Day 1957 and, in 1960, Searle married Fiona Nicholson a South African.

He composed three works for narrator and orchestra, Gold Coast Customs Op 15, The Riverrun Op 20, and The Shadow of Cain, Op 22, the first and third works have words by Edith Sitwell and the award winning Riverrun has a text by James Joyce. It is a masterpiece.

There are three operas, The Diary of Madman Op 35, The Photo of the Colonel Op 41, hugely entertaining, and Hamlet Op 48. There are three ballets namely The Great Peacock Op 34a 1958, Noctambules op 30 1956, and Dualities Op 39 of 1963. He wrote five symphonies. orchestral and chamber works and some very popular pieces such as the Fantasia on British Airs, Tamesis, the history of the Thames, and Three Ages Op 77 which is great fun. He wrote some film scores including the scary music for The Haunting of 1963.

He died in London on 12 May 1982, a great composer and pioneer.

15. Elizabeth Maconchy

There are two works for piano and orchestra.

1. Concertino for piano and chamber orchestra also known as the Piano Concerto no 1 (1930)
2. Concertino for piano and strings 1956.

Dame Elizabeth Violet Maconchy LeFanu was born on 18 March 1907 at Broxbourne, Hertfordshire of Irish heritage.

She studied at RCM with Vaughan Williams who was a likeable man but not a good teacher, and during 1929 and 1930 studied in Prague with Karel Jirak (1891- 1972) who premiered the Maconchy Piano Concerto no. 1 known as the Concertino for piano and chamber orchestra

She married William LeFanu in 1939 and they had two daughters Elizabeth Anne (1939) and Nicola (1947).

In 1932 Maconchy developed tuberculous and moved out of London to Kent.

She withdrew her Symphony no 1 but wrote her Symphony for double string orchestra in 1953 and wrote a Little Symphony in 1981. Some of her choral works are especially fine particularly Prayer Before Birth of 1971.

Her greatest success was in her series of thirteen string quartets.

She wrote three short operas namely The Sofa of 1957, The Departure of 1971 and The Three Strangers of 1967.

She was awarded the CBE in 1977 and became a Dame in 1987.

She died in Norwich on 11 November 1994.

16 Alan Rawsthorne

He wrote two piano concertos

1. 1939 revised 1942
2. 1951.

He was born in Haslington, Lancashire on 2 May 1905.

Even his greatest admirers will admit that some of his works are poor, such as the Halle and Farnham overtures, the Symphony no 2 and the string quartets.

He lived at a time when every composer's work was unfairly compared to Elgar, a composer that Rawsthorne did not rate. The Cello Concerto of Elgar made him physically ill and, although he studied Chopin, he was disappointed with his work.

He studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music and with Egon Petri in Poland.

In March 1934, Alan married the violinist Jessie Hinchclife and his best work was written with her in mind. They were bombed out of their house in Bristol shortly after the completion of the Piano Concerto no 1. He had already written a clarinet concerto of 1937, and an oboe concerto of 1947 appeared after the war and the less successful Piano Concerto no 2 dates from 1951. A cello concerto was completed in 1966.

He wrote some film scores and his settings of Eliot's Practical Cats was individual and valued.

Constant Lambert died in 1951 and Rawsthorne was already seeing Constant's wife, Isobel, romantically and later married her.

The splendid Fantasy Overture Corteges dates from 1945 and is a fine piece. The two Violin Concertos (1948 and 1956) have much to commend them as has the violin sonata (1960).

He wrote three symphonies between 1950 and 1964.

He died on 24 July 1971.

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