

NICOLAS BACRI

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Nicolas Bacri is a highly gifted and prolific French composer currently living in Belgium. Some of his works are immediate, durable and of exceptional quality and I would not wish to be without his symphonies, string quartets and other concertante works. He has written some beautiful meditative choral works of breathtaking beauty.

When I first heard his *Quasi un fantasia*, a concerto for three violins and orchestra, Op 118, I could not stop playing it. It is stunning; the writing for the soloists is flawless and the orchestra writing is spell binding and magnificent. It is tonal and will not present any problems for listeners. If they do not respond to this music or if they complain about it, one wonders if they are music lovers.

I turned to the string quartets which are remarkable. In fact, I cannot stop playing the String Quartet no 6. It is a masterwork and utterly convincing and deeply satisfying. The fact that I have said this will probably result in some reaction.

As a pianist, I listened to his Piano Sonata no 2 dedicated to the pianist Julien Question and inscribed to the memory of Kenneth Leighton.

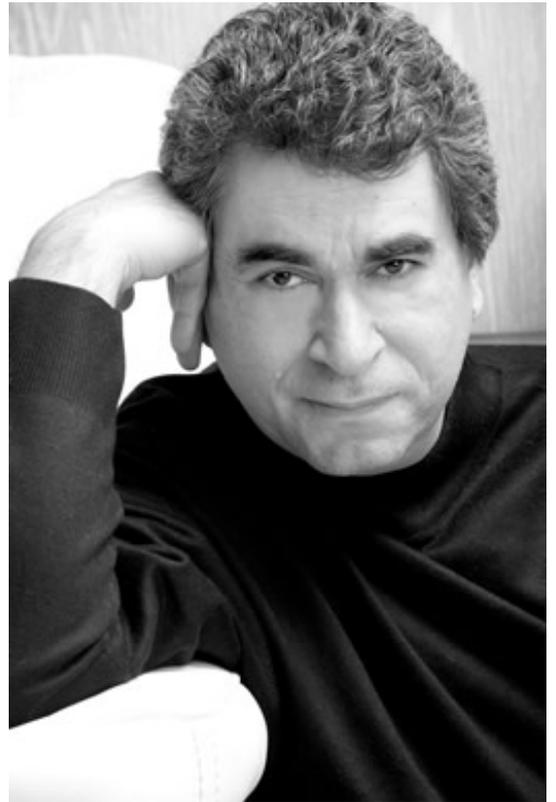
Bacri is a French composer who can write for the piano with ease and effectiveness. Unlike some of his predecessors his piano music is not just atmospheric but has thematic and coherent material. In discussing his piano music, I have gone to great lengths to explain how his music is so different from his predecessors.

While I am wishing to speak against other French composers who write for the piano, Bacri's music is not just atmosphere or melodic nullity, as one expert on French music said, and Bacri's music does not follow in the line of Debussy or Ravel but has thematic and memorable content.

This raises the question why is not his music regularly heard in the UK and elsewhere? It is classy and far superior to much of the music broadcast in the UK.

But there are many French composers who are ignored. Rene Alix wrote a fine string quartet and a highly enjoyable Piano Concerto. Marcel Delannoy won sincere praise from Ravel. Marcel Mihalovici has written some fascinating symphonies. Gustav Samazeuilh wrote some delightful piano music and songs and a book on Dukas. I mention these as examples of French composers who are unknown in the UK and elsewhere.

Nicolas refers to other French composers who are forgotten such as Henry Barraud (1900-1997) who failed to graduate at the Paris Conservatoire because he would not bow to orthodox methods which he regarded as anachronistic. With Pierre-Octave Ferroud and Jean Rivier he founded the chamber group Triton who sought to promote contemporary music. As well as being a good composer, Barraud wrote books on French music, opera and Berlioz.



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Pierre-Octave Ferroud was an exceptionally fine composer as his Symphony in A and his splendid String Quartet testify. The symphony was greatly admired by Prokofiev. Ferroud was born in Chasseley, near Lyon in 1900 and studied with Guy Ropartz. He was an admirer of Florent Schmitt and wrote a book about him. Ferroud died in a car accident in Hungary in 1936.

Little is known about Jean Louis Cartan. He was born in 1906 at Nancy and studied with Paul Dukas and among his own works are two fine string quartets.

With Bacri we have what is best in music and, on a personal note, he was always a very kind and co-operative correspondent. He took an interest in British music which was sincere and encouraging.

His father was Jean-Claude Bacri born in Algiers in 1930. He took an alias in 1952 when he was chosen to be the pianist for Radio Algiers. In 1956, he and his family moved to Paris and, after two difficult years, became one of the most famous of French conductors of popular music of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s orchestrating songs sung by Maurice Chevalier, Josephine Baker, Bourvil, Charles Aznavour, Mireille Mathieu and many others. Jean-Claude's wife was a singer but ceased to be so on her marriage. They had two sons and Nicolas and his music is the subject of this essay. Both his parents are Jewish.

Nicolas was born in Paris on 23 November 1961. His first lessons were with the harpist Marie-Therese Jacquot from the age of seven. She also taught the piano. He continued his piano studies with Marcelle Brousse some years later but admitted he never took this seriously. As a child, he admired Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Bartok, Debussy, Ravel, Dukas and some of the classics. At the age of fourteen he discovered English music, which still interests him, and later, at nineteen years old, he discovered Mahler and Shostakovich.

He was greatly encouraged by Francoise Gangloff-Levechin who gave him lessons during the years 1974 to 1983. She was and remains the organist at St Roch Church in Paris and Bacri showed her his compositions.

However, he never took the piano seriously after 1979. He had lessons in other musical matters with Louis Sagner during the years 1978 to 1983 and Bacri continued to show him his compositions until 1991. The name Sagner was an alias for Wolfgang Simoni and he took this name during World War II when he was in the French Resistance and took French nationality. He was a communist and at the end of his life, in 1991, he may have regretted this error. He had been a pupil of Milhaud, Honegger and Hindemith and was a friend of Stravinsky.

While studying with Gangloff-Levechin, Bacri also had lessons with Christian Manen during the years 1976 to 1978. Manen was born in 1934 and won a Grand Prix de Rome in 1961. He was a pupil both of Tony Aubin and Messiaen and became an organist and conductor. He composed cheerful tonal music which has not really caught on. Bacri has said that he would like to hear Manen's Symphony and his Harp Quintet and other works of his.

To backtrack for a moment. In 1977 Nicolas' father has been asked to contribute some original orchestral pieces as incidental music for a LP. His son asked if he could write one and actually wrote eight.

Nicolas entered the Paris Conservatoire and studied with Claude Ballif, Marius Constant, Serge Nigg and Michel Philipott. Bacri was a student there between the years 1980 and 1983.

Claude Ballif (1924-2004) and Serge Nigg (1924-2008) were very able composers and both could write serial music, a discipline that only great composers can achieve, although they did not specialise in this exacting form. Nigg was a pupil of Messiaen and among his works are two interesting piano concertos. Marius Constant (1925-2004) was a Rumanian-born French composer

of ballets, a piano concerto and his 24 Preludes for orchestra. Philipott was born in 1925 and is also a mathematician.

Many well-known musicians have taken up Bacri's music. The American-Russian-Jewish conductor, Semyon Byshkov, born 1952, admired his work. The French oboist, Francois Leleux, born 1971, at the Juventus Festival in France wanted new works and Bacri responded with his Mondorf Sonata. Leleux requested a Double Concerto for himself and the distinguished cellist Natalie Gutman.

The French violin virtuoso Jean-Jacques Kantorow, who was born in 1945, was interested in Bacri's music and of his pupils was in a programmed performance of Bacri's Piano Trio no. 2 in the Festival-Academie Ravel at St Jean de Luz.

Later, he studied conducting with Jean Catoire, a Russian composer of French origin (1923-2005) who had been a pupil of Messiaen. Catoire was a very prolific composer. His Requiem is Op 573. Nicolas was with Catoire from 1980 to 1988.

Nicolas married the concert pianist Eliane Reyes on 31 August 2012.

THE STRING QUARTETS

No other French composer has devoted his time and skill so well as Bacri has with his string quartets, a medium still regarded as the most intimate. What other French composer has written eight string quartets?

Jean-Guy Bailly was born in 1925 and Bacri commissioned Bailly's sixth quartet when he was head of chamber music department of Radio France (1987-91). As to Bacri's own prolific output, he is the only French composer in history so far, along with Jean Catoire, to have written 6 symphonies before reaching the age of 40.

Bacri has taken the string quartet genre and made it his very own and it is clear that he is seeking his own voice and style..

His Opus 1 was his first string quartet followed by the String Quartet no 2, Op 5. The String Quartet no 3, Op 18 is entitled Esquisses pour un tombeau (Sketches for a tomb). It is concise lasting 8 minutes and like many of Bacri's works written as an in memorial – this time to the composer Alexander Zemlinsky. It was written between 1985 and 1988 and is in three movements and is funereal in character and, in a small measure, may hint at Zemlinsky's Quartet no 2. There is a quote from Shakespeare's The Tempest, "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep." It was written about the time that Bacri met with the Italian composer, Scelsi. And his influence is audible.

The String Quartet no 4, Op 42 was six years in the making having been written between 1989 and 1995 and is entitled Homage to Beethoven. The Beethoven in mind is the Grosse Fugue. The quartet is in three movements, the outer ones being slow with a middle movement which is a toccata and variations. This opening movement is also funereal in character but increases in dramatic content and is in ABA form. Sometimes the music is painfully beautiful and is one of the very many examples of this composer's reverence and acknowledgement of other composers. Sometimes the toccata movement is somewhat restrained which makes a fine contrast with the fiery music. The finale is a meditation based on the spirit of the Lux Aeterna and has a choral-like theme. It is a sombre piece.

Throughout this work there are passages written as Beethoven might have written them and, by this, Bacri is recognising the master's skill and technique.

It is a very fine quartet.

Dedicated to the Danel Quartet, the String Quartet no 5, Op 57 is an extended work of about 25 minutes. It is in four movements marked Sonata, Elegie, Scherzo senza trio and a substantial Passacaglia. It was written in the summer of 1997. The first movement is a true sonata. There is a beautiful lyricism and a strident and perhaps acidic harsh rhythmic vitality. At one point we seem to briefly drift into a waltz like feeling.

The Elegie was written in memory of a friend, Thierry Mobillon, Head of the Durand publishing house, and the work is continuously melodious and poignantly sad. The letters in the name of the dead friend are used as an In Nomine. The calm gives way to a dramatic outpouring before the calm returns. This lament might be a little too much for some.

The Scherzo is joyful music with effective pizzicato writing and it dispels the sorrow of what has gone before. Some have said that it is reminiscent of Bartok but, as with all of Bacri's quartets, the music always has an original voice. The perpetual mobile style generates breathtaking excitement. That there is no trio section is a wise judgement since we do not lose the work's impetus. The finale, an extended passacaglia, is marked *adagio doloroso* and is in ABA form and largely rooted in the low registers of the instruments. The use of a traditional form, the passacaglia, shows Bacri's acceptance of traditional forms as also we see in the opening movement named sonata. What is admirable is the coherence of the passacaglia; it can be easily followed. The music here is more airy than the elegy. The theme of the first movement reappears making the work cyclic and convincing. It is a major work and deserves worldwide recognition.

The String Quartet no 6, Op 97, is in three movements and dates from 2006.

Let me give some details of this absorbing work.

The first movement begins in an eerie, sinister fashion before exploding into a vigorous and exciting meteor shower. The music is tense, edgy, passionate, dramatic and utterly convincing. Sometimes it seems brutal and other times sad or lyrically introspective. All the instruments are treated as equal, as they should be, making for an integral movement. The slow movement *Adagio molto* uses material from the opening movement as a development that one finds in sonata form and is predominately lyrical and, to my mind, has the feel of a tragedy. The finale, *allegro impetuoso e furioso*, is a set of variations and a fugue. Not only is it exciting but it has a relentless rhythmic drive. At bar 111, the music is marked *massivo* and, at bar 133, the music slightly slackens into a mysterious mode. The dramatic and exciting music makes a welcome return and, as we have said, the slow movement, an *adagio molto*, recalls the opening. The variations and fugue is marked *impetuoso* and becomes *furioso*. Was ever a quartet so exciting? There are some gorgeous lyrical passages marked *espressivo* and then *furtivo*. There is a *giocosso* passage, eleven bars marked *serio* and then we are back into the dramatic music. There is a magnificent and triumphant conclusion.

In fact, the finale is a synthesis between fugue and variations. As you can see in the score, the subject is, each time, varied but strictly following the scheme of a real "fugue d'école".

The Quartet lasts about 14 minutes and is dedicated to Jacques Boisgallais, who is a very good composer and whose works include two symphonies and three string quartets also dedicated to the Psophos Quartet. The introduction is a thoughtful *Adagio* leading to a very exciting *allegro fuocosso*. The solemn music returns, followed by the *allegro* marked *legato marcato* and which becomes stirring and exhilarating in a passage marked *brutal*.

This work is a masterpiece and I cannot refrain from saying so and as good as the masterly quartets of Bartok. It is music from both the heart and the brain and it reaches the soul. There is something indefinably special about this work. I could not be without it. If the Quartet no 5 deserves world wide recognition, this quartet is an even more obvious choice.

Bacri's earlier visit to England consolidated his respect for contemporary British music. He talks with quiet and sincere enthusiasm about some British composers such as Searle, Fricker, Hamilton, Leighton and Robert Simpson.

Nicolas's String Quartet no 7, Op 101 entitled Variations Serieuses was written between 2006 and 2007 and is headed In Memoriam Robert Simpson (1921-1997)

Bob Simpson is probably Britain's finest composer of string quartets and his eleven symphonies which range from the very good to the sensational. His genius was recognised by William Glock when he was the Controller of Music at the BBC, but subsequent controllers have ignored and persecuted Simpson.

Bacri's Quartet no 7 is dedicated to Alain Meunier, the cellist and director of the Bordeaux international String Quartet Competition. This work begins with an adagio solenne and then introduces the theme for the fugue which begins in unison on all four instruments. The first variation is a scherzo and trio with a coda marked *marcatissimo*. The second variation is a sarabande funebre with a section headed *dolcissimo doloroso* and contains music of beauty. The third variation is marked sonata and is in Bacri's powerful and exciting style. There are some interludes before the fourth variation, a passacaglia begun by the viola in which the name of Bach appears, first in bar 207. A ciaccona makes up variation five. An interlude follows and the sixth variation is a minuet which might be difficult to dance to with its heavy martial and *marcato* music. Beethoven said, "I will write minuets that no one can dance to since the music is more important than dancing!" After a coda we have the fugue begun on the cello. There is a series of duos... violin one with viola, violin two with cello giving the work a concertante feel. There is an epilogue recalling the opening and the fugue concludes the work.

Haydn is remembered in Bacri's String Quartet no 8, Op 112 which dates from 2008 - 2009. It is dedicated to Georges Zeisel the director of the string quartet society, Pro Quartet, who commissioned this work. The quartet is another homage work and this time it is Haydn who is being honoured. The first movement is a sonata all'ungarese recalling Haydn's time in Hungary After a slow introduction, we are propelled into an allegro capturing the joy that we often find in Haydn's music. The second movement, Notturmo, is remarkable for its Haydnesque simplicity and is played *con sordini*, but the music is never banal. The third movement is a set of variations and fugue on a minuet by Haydn which portrays the grace and elegance of Haydn. The sixth variation is a very well-written fugue and the final pages are incisive and dramatic.

I feel the composer must not concentrate on a programme that could cause him to be labelled as typecast. The variation form has its limitations and the fugue is a traditional form which may not always be applicable in today's music. Honouring other composers is a mark of respect but may, as to both skill and content, sometimes give the wrong impression that a composer is not dependent on his own material. We must beware of anachronism and composers should probably be more radical.

It is true that Bacri's most profound string quartets are the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth.

The Fifth and Sixth together are the most perfect and profound and the Seventh and Eighth are most satisfying but, perhaps not as profound as Fifth and Sixth. The Fifth and Sixth are the most excellent image of what constitutes Bacri's best music. The Seventh and Eighth also reflect the composer's enviable technical skills. Bacri wishes to have the opportunity to write a Quartet no 9 soon and to be totally free to express, again, his intimate feeling of what a string quartet should be.

However, all these quartets are very fine and present us with a fascinating journey and are very well-written musical literature of the highest value and quality.

THE PIANO MUSIC

French piano music is probably most noted for its impressionism. It is true to say that much of the music of Debussy is merely atmospheric or evocative. It has no theme or thematic material and some are merely piano studies evoking a mood.

It is what that the distinguished musicologist, David Drew, called such music melodic nullity. The same could be said of the studies of Chopin and Scriabin.

It is both hypocritical and grossly unfair when people criticise and condemn modern music as having no tune or logic. Where is the tune in Debussy's *Feux d'artifice* (Fireworks) from book 2 of the Preludes and does it sound like fireworks? No, it does not. One can visualise *Jardins sous la pluie* from *Estantpes* or *La cathedrale engloutie* from book 1 of the Preludes and they are fine pieces. Would you consider moonlight if the piece *Clair de Lune* from the *Suite Bergamasque* of 1890 was not so titled? In *Children's Corner* of 1908 does the *Serenade for a Doll* or *The Snow is Dancing* convey those titles. If there were just called *Allegretto ma non troppo* or *Moderement anime* as in the score, would a doll or the snow come into your mind?

Of course, it will be argued that the title is how the composer saw the event he describes. This is one of the problems with descriptive and programme music. It will also be said that if the music is themeless it is still music.

John Ireland wrote many piano pieces with descriptive titles such as *The Towpath*, *Chelsea Reach* and *Merry Andrew*. Whatever one thinks of such pieces, it is impossible to conjure up these locations by hearing the music. And who is Merry Andrew? Is it not important for the composer to communicate with the audience?

Impressionism in music is said to be painting in music and a reaction against Romantic music. It is said to focus on atmosphere rather than emotions or a narrative and make more use of dissonance.

There are people who object to dissonance and discords and do not realise that dissonance has always existed even as far back as medieval music. Can you imagine Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* without dissonance? The tension, drama and excitement would not exist if the music were all consonances.

This lengthy discourse is significant because Bacri's music is not impressionism. It is classical in the broad sense of the word: it is modernist in that it is music of our time; it is romantic since it contains various aspects of expression.

Bacri's music, including that for the piano, is not in the line of Debussy or Ravel because it contains clear themes and thematic material.

If there is a French sound in music I do not detect it in Bacri's music which is more universal in style. He is an independent composer.

There are at least three outstanding works for solo piano, the *Petites Variations sur un theme dodecaphonique* Op 69 no 3 which reveals that the composer is not phased by serial music, the impressive *Prelude and Fugue* Op 91 which is yet another proof that he is not an impressionist nor worshipping at the shrines of Debussy and Ravel. The baroque/classical era is here acknowledged and it does not sound French.

The masterwork must be the *Piano Sonata no 2* Op 105 set in three movements a lyrical *Andante doloroso*, a magnificent attention-gripping *Scherzo* and a very successful finale, an *allegro moderato alla fugue*. It is so well written for the piano, is virtuosic and a work that calls for spontaneous applause and bravos.

The Prelude and Fugue was written for the Fourth Pontoise International piano competition and is dedicated to fellow composer Rene Mailliard. It unashamedly begins in C and both parts are integrated. I admired its lyrical qualities which saves it from being merely academic.

It may be true to say that there are very few fine French piano sonatas. That of Henri Dutilleux is a very good piece but fiendishly difficult to bring off. With Bacri's sonata we have a great but natural virtuosity. It was premiered in its original version by its dedicatee Julien Quentin but the revised version was first given by Eliane Reyes and bears the inscription in memoriam Kenneth Leighton, the Scottish composer who is now only beginning to be appreciated. He was a first class composer and a most congenial man.

Bacri has taken an interest in British music and my first contact with him many years ago was when he rang me to enquire about Robert Crawford.

This sonata has an opening doloroso movement but it is devoid of ghastly sentiment. The Scherzo is a real scherzo with variations of dramatic content and fascinating rhythms. At times the sarcasm of Prokofiev may be slightly detected. The fugue of the finale owes much to the thematic material of the opening movement; the whole work is of superlative quality.

It is a cyclic work based on transformation of themes. Thus it is based on the same themes and on purpose, just like in the Liszt Sonata and most of the sonatas written in the Liszt heritage.

The Petites variations sur un theme dodecaphonique were written in Paris in 1979. As far as I am concerned this work shows that both beauty and great interest can be portrayed in serial music as in other forms. In the hands of very great composers serial music can be lyrical and have stunning beauty as well as drama and excitement as, for me, in the glowing Berg Violin Concerto and Searle's Symphony no 2. This sonata is dedicated to Serge Nigg who was conversant and adept at serial music, and wrote beautiful serial music as "Visages d'Axel" for large orchestra which is an overwhelming and personal synthesis of Berg and Debussy.

Diletto classico Op 100 is in three sections namely Suite baroque, Sonatina Classica and, finally, Arioso barocco e fuga monodica a due voci. This is not anachronisms or a typical ' Suite in the olden style. The overall title in English would be Classical delights. The work is potentially humorous and it has been suggested that it was a vehicle for Bacri to reassess his work. The sonatina is probably the best of the music and this both recalls Prokofiev and the Classical Symphony particularly with the Gavotte. The fugue which ends the final movement of this triptych is a very rewarding piece.

The Petit Prelude dates from 1978 and lasts under a minute. The Deux Esquisses Lyrique are in a nationalistic Lyriques with Russia and then Scandinavian in mind. They were a sincere desire to reinvigorate salon music.

L'Enfance d'Art is a set of pieces first conceived between 1976 and 1979. They are not juvenalia but works of his informative years.

They are very important to the composer because they showed him, when he rediscovered and published them ten years ago, that he had found his style right at the beginning of his career.

Nicolas Bacri can certainly write for the piano. And there are many works not mentioned in this section which are worthy of consideration.

THE CONCERTOS

I am not going to write about all of the concertos or put them into chronological order but in the order I have heard them.

As in my writing about other genres, I cannot include all his works in any genre. I will include those I have heard.

Bacri's Op 2 was a piano concerto which he now considers to be too derivative. There is a Trumpet Concerto Op 39 of 1992 which is a homage to Michael Tippett, a Sinfonia Concertante for two pianos and orchestra Op 51, a Chamber Concerto for clarinet and string orchestra Op 61 of 1998, and the Trumpet Concerto no 2 op 65 of 2000.

The Cello Concerto Op 17 was written between 1985 - 1987 and is in four movements.... Naissance (Con fantasia -calmo), Metamorphose (Vivo), Liberation (Lento) Affirmation (Adagio quasi variazoni).

It is a truly brilliant piece which shows an enviable understanding of the cello and is the finest and more interesting and original cello concerto since that of Boris Blacher in 1964. The style Bacri uses is the style in which he is the most compelling. He describes this concerto as the symbol of rediscovered simplicity. It is also described as a sort of initiation rite and yet it is another homage work this time to the memory of Frank Bridge and dedicated to Henri Dutilleux. I recall the great American cellist Lynn Harrell saying that there are only two great Cello Concertos namely those by Dvorak and Dutilleux.

Bacri says he was inspired by Bridge's Oration for cello and orchestra which I find very surprising as many of us find that work wearisome.

I cannot see how Bacri's concerto has a first movement headed calmo. It is very intense, very emotional and very human. There is a long passage of unaccompanied cello which explores its range and capabilities to perfection.

I am not convinced that a finale which is a set of variations makes a satisfactory conclusion to any work notwithstanding Bacri's adeptness in doing so.

Elliott Carter, who was the inspiration behind Bacri's splendid Symphony no 1, wrote in 1989, ' Nicolas Bacri's music is certainly worth studying. The imagination and musical mastery which are so evident in his scores brings him to the forefront of French composers of his generation.'

This Cello Concerto must be given a wide circulation and be heard. It certainly puts some famous cello concertos in the shade.

If you wish to hear moments of very great beauty you must hear his Folia, a symphonic chaconne Op 30b scored for viola and string orchestra. It dates from 1990.

The Violin Concerto no 2 is entitled Tre canti and finale. It is Op 29 and is in two movements and was written between 1987 and 1989. The first thing that is apparent is the incredibly fine orchestration which is simply stunning. It takes a great talent to combine gorgeous lyricism with controlled power. The opening section is a contrast between dolorosa music and threatening music and one can detect a hint of the Bachian chorale ' It is enough ' from the closing pages of the sumptuous Berg Concerto. Bacri's writing for the violin is exemplary producing long strands of enchanting melodic lines especially in the middle movement, a Cavatina. The next section is brief at under two minutes but it is marked semplice e dolce which may explain its brevity. The finale which is the second movement is made up, in effect, of three cadenzas marked Con bravura, sognando and presto-prestissimo respectively. Sognando means dreaming. Not only is the writing

for the violin choice, so are the orchestral contributions. Sometimes it is menacing and angry music. It is never dull.

The Requiem for viola and chamber orchestra Op 23 dates from 1987 - 1988 and is not the traditional requiem for the dead, although the final of the three movements is called a Cradle song for the dead. I find it a pity that the viola is often associated with funereal music as in Hindemith's Trauermusik. It is a lovely instrument and has been called the Cinderella of the orchestra. It is another homage work, this time the recipient is Shostakovich who wrote a very desolate sonata for viola and piano. Contrast that with Piston's Viola Concerto with its music of jollity and fun.

The title Requiem colours this work and therefore the title is apt.

The Flute Concerto Op 63 was commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture and dedicated to the flautist Philippe Bernold having its premiere on 9 January 2000. It is another fine concerto which exploits the range of the flute without excess and without worthless gimmicks. The opening movement is Largo misterioso - allegro moderato. The middle movement is marked estatico and is a profound movement of appealing sonorities. To me it evokes a pastoral scene, a warm delightful day in the country with all its benefits. It is nostalgic without sentimentality, a truly feel good movement. Luscious music indeed. There are moments of some suggested disturbance but if I have written this movement I would be satisfied and not want to write anything else.

The finale is dramatic but it is not excessive. It has a sombre mood at times and someone has said that the pizzicato in the basses suggests a blues. Why do people make so much of this? Beethoven's last piano sonata has a blues passage, a work of Alkan has as well, the Barcarolle from Troisième Recueil de chants Op 65 no.6, and Beethoven lived years before the blues were 'invented' in the USA.

Opus 80 consists of four attractive concertos representing the seasons. The first is Autumn, the second Spring and so on. Autumn dating from 2000 to 2002 is scored for oboe, cello and string orchestra and is made up of an elegy, scherzo alla fuge, romance and an epilogue in about eleven minutes. It is subtitled Concerto Nostalgico. It contains some lush music, although some may feel it meanders somewhat. It is rather bleak. Concerto Amorofo, Le Printemps, is scored for oboe, violin and string orchestra and dates from 2004 - 2005. Concerto tenebrofo, Winter, is for oboe or violin, viola and string orchestra and was completed in 2005. Concerto luminoso, Summer, is the last of the four that make up Op 80 and is scored for oboe or violin and string orchestra and was completed in 2009.

The Violin Concerto no Op 83 is a splendid work... so very well written for the soloist and the orchestral writing is quite superb. It was written between 2002 and 2003. It is a major work lasting about 30 minutes. There are three movements namely Gran Fantasia, a Funeral March and an Intermezzo and Fuge. Each of the movements have other in-built sections which is a frequent concept of this composer. This can result in episodic music or 'stop and start music' which in the hands of a really good composer works. The slow movement is not a brooding cortege but contains some of the most beautiful music Bacri has written.

To my mind, his finest achievement in this genre is the Quasi un fantasia for three violins and orchestra, Op 118. It was written for three marvellous young violinists, Lisa Batiashvili, Alina Pogostkina and Baiba Skride and is 57 pages of full score and lasts about 13 minutes of sheer delight, inventiveness, skill, technique in which Bacri shows himself to be a supreme master and, in works such as this, that cannot be denied.

The work opens with a brief allegro furioso section with florid orchestral writing. The adagio non troppo is lyrical with a profound and memorable theme in the strings and first horn. The first violin enters at the Andante espressivo section with that luscious theme. The second violin has a cadenza and the third violinist has a giocoso theme. This is followed by some gorgeous orchestral writing and

the three violinists come together in bars 72 and 73. There is a lot of sumptuous lyricism, energy and coherence. If any work can be perfect, then surely this is.

SOME ORCHESTRAL WORKS

It is not possible to discuss all of Bacri's orchestral works. I have, in the main confined myself to the symphonies which are a vital part of his output.

The Symphony no 1 for large orchestra, Op 11, of 1983-4 was dedicated to the late Elliot Carter on his 75th birthday. It is an incredible work as far as I am concerned. Most people will say it is 'modern' but it is original and highly textured.

It falls into the following sections Prelude (Fuocoso- violentissimo), Preface 1 (Adagio inquieto), Grille polyphonique (Con slando), Intermezzo (Flemmatico), Preface II (Immobile), Arbe polyphonic (Impetuoso -Ossessivo) and Postlude. It could be said to be in five movements or seven.

I do not think it is important to identify the sections since the work is a coherent and logical whole. The orchestration and colouring is exemplary. The sound world is strikingly original with luscious melodic fragments. The music is strong and sinewy and may stand between Berg and Schoenberg's Five Pieces for orchestra but it is not emulation or imitation but muscular and satisfying; it is music with a fascinating compulsion.

It was premiered in Paris on 13 February 1988, its only performance to date. It was played by the Philharmonic Orchestra of French Radio under Arturo Tamaya.

The Symphony no 2 (Sinfonia dolorosa), Op 22, dates from 1986-1990 and was written in memory of Allan Petterson, the distinguished Swedish composer (1911-1980) who wrote 16 symphonies between 1951 and 1979.

He left a fragment of Symphony no 17 for alto saxophone and orchestra when he died. His symphonies had a good following during his lifetime and they are serious, sometimes dissonant but highly original. He also composed two fine violin concertos.

Bacri's symphony is a highly original work made up of four adagio movements lasting about 27 minutes. It was premiered in July 1990 by the Lyric Orchestra of Avignon-Provence conducted by Michel Beroff.

It is a work I long to hear.

Sinfonia da Requiem is the title of the Symphony no 3, Op 53, and dates from 1988 -1994. I trust Mr Bacri will forgive me but, to me, this is an uneven work although its premiere in 2012 was a success. It is scored for mezzo soprano, chorus and orchestra and is in twelve sections lasting about 72 minutes.

The sections are

- 1 Dies Irae
- 2 Cantata prima Vitae abdication
- 3 Lux Aeterna
- 4 Cantata seconda Coplas de Don Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre
- 5 Coplas X and XII
- 6 Largo estatico
- 7 De proundis
- 8 Requiem aeternam

- 9 Cantata terzo Vita et Mors marked largo estatico
- 10 Giocososo
- 11 Largo estatico
- 12 In Paradisum

The opening orchestral Dies Irae is stunning. The first cantata is slow moving and has an ostinato three note figure on the harp which becomes a little tedious. The oboe has a substantial role in this movement as it does in the following one which is plaintive and sometimes agitated. There is a glorious string theme after the first mezzo's entry and the gorgeous rich strings of velvety textures are evident in the third movement. The plaintiveness is taken over by the cor anglais with some very beautiful music. The second cantata often has a stillness of beauty and in the Coplas X and XII there is a stunning climatic moment in an allegro ritmico movement. The final movements tend to be inactive although there is much beauty in them.

The Fourth Symphony, Op 49, of 1995 is in the classical Sturm and Drang style. It has four movements

- Allegro fuocososo Homage to Richard Strauss
- Arietta (Larghetto) Homage to Igor Stravinsky
- Menuetto (Allegretto con maliza) Homage to Schoenberg
- Allegro spiritoso con una coda parodica Homage to Kurt Weill

What an arresting opening. All music needs a start like this. We are in the realms of rich romanticism with a very strong music. It is compelling and exciting to the point of being somewhat dangerous—only musicians will understand that remark. It is music that produces an immediate response and to quote a composer of the past the desire to throw your hat in the air and shout, “Genius!”. The opening movement is three and a half minutes of music of non stop thrills. The second movement is relaxed but not weak with a superb oboe solo and the string writing is superlative. The third movement is rugged but with a wry sense of humour and reminds one of Beethoven's minuet in his Symphony no 1, “The music is what is important not the steps of a dance!” This could be called modern classicism.

Having paid homage to three great composers the inclusion of Kurt Weill is a mystery. Again the music is strong, well-written and superbly orchestrated. And revel in the fugato section that ends the work!

The performance by the Tapiola Sinfonietta under Jean-Jacques Kantorow is quite magnificent. BIS-CD-1579

The Concerto for Orchestra is the title of the Symphony no 5, Op 55, written between 1996 and 1997

It is basically in five sections

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| Fanfares and allegro impetuoso | lasting 5. 49 |
| Duos (Adagio notturno e drammatico) | 3. 42 |
| Scherzando molto -Largo espressivo-Grave-Lontano | 3. 03 |
| Interlude-valse (Andante maliconico) | 5. 04 |
| Finale alla Toccata (Allegro energico) | 5. 13 |

It was premiered in Amiens by the Picardy Symphony Orchesta conducted by Louis Langree.

This symphony opens with powerful fanfares and impressive logic. The orchestration is stunning, It is well structured and coherent music. The second section has some exquisite writing for the strings, beautiful but not banal, and includes a superb flute solo. The scherzando molto takes your breath

away. What a gift Bacri has for orchestration! The Interlude, a waltz, may not reach the same heights of excellence but the toccata-line finale brings this superlative work to a close.

The Symphony no 6 for large orchestra lasts 12 minutes and was composed in 1998. It is truly impressive. I again admire how well the composer uses a large orchestra. The work is dedicated to Serge Nigg and the premiere was given by the National Orchestra of France under Leonard Slatkin.

A Largo raccogliato of earthly beauty is followed by an Allegro Collierio with some of the most tremendous moments you will find in any symphonic literature. A scherzo marked Vivace misterioso and then Adagio and Vivace delicissimo e poco a poco strepitoso, an adagio raccogliato e poco a poco agitate - allegro entusiastico. The mighty work again reveals this composer's enviable skill and marvellous control of a large orchestra. The texture is never thick and does not suffer from endless doublings.

At the time of writing the Symphony no 7, Op 124 is in progress

There are many other orchestral works of note. I have to mention one.

Une priere for cello and orchestra, Op 53 is a masterpiece. I have heard the version for violin and orchestra and I have to admit that this is the most ravishingly beautiful concertante work I have ever heard. It is strong and not feeble; it is lush but not sentimental; it has no weak moments; it is sensual and some might even say sexy, although I cannot see how absolute music without words can be that. It was written in memory of Jewish martyrs of all times. This work is a winner and music of the highest order as is the Quasi una fantasia for three violins and orchestra, Op 118.

There are so many other works I could write about such as his splendid Piano Trio no 1, his fine works for clarinet and some delightful chamber music but I trust this brief survey of some selected works will suffice at the moment.

In England, and elsewhere, his work is probably unknown and that is an injustice that must be put right and I hope this essay might achieve that, or go some way to achieve this.

List of works

- String Quartet No. 1 op. 1 (1980)
- Concerto for piano and orchestra op. 2 (1980-81)
- Two Lieder for violin (or viola) and piano op. 3 (1981)
- Serenade for solo oboe and chamber ensemble No. 1 op. 4 (1981-82/rev.1989)
- String Quartet No. 2 (Five Pieces op. 5) (1982)
- Episodes nocturnes, for two violas op. 6 No. 1 (1982)
- Threnos, for two violas op. 6 No. 2 (1987/89)
- Concerto (No. 1) for violin and 21 instruments op. 7 (1982-83)
- String trio (Six Sonatats for violin, viola and cello) op. 8 (1982-83)
- Croisements (Duo for violin and viola No.1) op. 9 (1983-84)
- Serenade, for solo viola, alto-flute, harp and vibraphone, No. 2 op. 10 (1983)
- Symphony No. 1, for large orchestra, op. 11 (1983-84)
- Bagatelle for piano op. 12 No. 1 (1982)
- Bagatelles for clarinet and piano op. 12 No 2 (1985)
- Three Fragments for piano op. 13 (1984-89)
- Notturmi (Concerto quasi una sinfonia piccola, for soprano and chamber ensemble) op. 14 (1985-86)
- Four Nocturnes, for oboe and violin, op. 15 (1985/rev. 87)
- four Intermezzi (Duo for violin and viola No. 2) op. 16 (1984/90)

Concerto for violoncello and orchestra op. 17 (1985/87)
 String Quartet No. 3 (Esquisses pour un Tombeau) op. 18 (1985/88)
 La Musique d'Erich Zann (After H.P. Lovecraft) for solo violin, op. 19 (1986/rev. 87)
 Capriccio Notturmo (Concerto for clarinet and large chamber ensemble) op. 20 (1986-87)
 Three small Rhapsodies for violin solo op. 21 (1979/86)
 Two small Rhapsodies for clarinet solo op. 21b (1979)
 Symphony No. 2 (Sinfonia dolorosa), for large orchestra, op. 22 (1986/88/rev. 90)
 Requiem (for viola or cello, and chamber orchestra) op. 23 (1987-88)
 Two Preludes for piano op. 24 (1988)
 Duo for violin and cello op. 25 (1987-88/92)
 Serenade (A Landscape), for solo flute and five instruments, Nr. 3 op. 26 (1988/rév. 91)
 A Landscape (Wind quintet) op. 26b (1988/92)
 Quasi Variazioni, for cello (or viola) and piano op. 27 (1989)
 Three Preludes for piano op. 28 (1989)
 Tre Canti e Finale (Concerto No. 2, for violin and orchestra) op. 29 (1987-89)
 Cantilènes (for violin and orchestra) op. 29b (1988-89)
 Folia (for orchestra) op. 30 (1990)
 Folia (for viola (or cello), and string orchestra op. 30b (1990)
 Chaconne (Duo No. 3 for violin and viola) op. 30c (1990)
 Suite No. 1 "Preludio e metamorfosi" op. 31 for cello solo (1987/90/rev. 94/2010)
 Suite No.2 "Tragica" op. 31 for cello solo (1991-93)
 Suite No. 3 "Vita et Mors" op. 31 for cello solo (1992-93)
 Sonata for violoncello and piano op. 32 (1990-92/rev. 94)
 Symphony No. 3 (Sinfonia da Requiem, for large orchestra, mezzo soprano and chorus) op. 33 (1988-94)
 Vitae abdicatio (Cantata no. 1, for mezzo soprano, solo oboe and chamber orchestra) op. 33 No. 1 (1992-94)
 Coplas de Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre, for mixed chorus a cappella, op. 33 No. 2 (1993)
 Coplas de Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre, for mixed chorus and four wind instruments (or organ), op. 33 Nro 2b (1993)
 Vita et Mors, for mezzo soprano, cello solo and chamber orchestra, op. 33 Nr. 3 (1992-93)
 6th Prelude for piano, op. 33 No. 3b (1991)
 Prelude for organ op. 33 No 3c (1991)
 In modo infinito (Five meditations for large orchestra and children (or female) chorus, op. 33 Nro 4 (1988-90)
 Toccata sinfonica for piano trio op. 34 (1987/89/rev. 92-93)
 Toccata sinfonica for piano and string quartet, op. 34b (1987-93/95)
 American letters, for piano, clarinet and viola, op. 35 (1991-94)
 Night Mysteries, for piano, clarinet and viola, op. 35 No. 1 (1994)
 Elegy for A. C., for piano, clarinet and viola, op. 35 No 2 (1991-92)
 Adams Dances, for piano, clarinet and viola, op. 35 Nro 3 (1993)
 String Sextet op. 36 (1991-92)
 Musica per archi (for string orchestra) op. 36b (after sting sextet)
 Divertimento for clarinet, violin, viola and cello op. 37 (1991-92)
 Divertimento for violin, viola and cello op. 37b (1991-92)
 Sonatina for piano op. 38 (1992)
 Quatre Bagatelles (Four Bagatellen), for wind quintet op. 38b (1992) (after sonatina)
 Sinfonietta for wind orchestra op. 38c (1992) (after sonatina)
 Concerto for trumpet (Episodes in omaggio a Sir Michael Tippett) op. 39 (1992)
 Sonata for violin and piano op. 40 (1993-94)
 Trois Alleluia [Three Halleluja] op. 41 for female (or children) choir (1994)
 Four Hallelujas op. 41b for female (or children) choir and orchestra (1994)

String Quartet No. 4 (Omaggio a Beethoven) op. 42 (1989-90/93-94/rev. 95-96)
 Im Volkston (Divertimento No. 2) for clarinet, violin and cello, op. 43 (1994)
 Cantata No. 4 (Shakespeare Sonnet 66), for mezzo soprano and string orchestra (or cello ensemble),
 op. 44 (1994-95)
 Sonata breve in omaggio a Mozart (Violin sonatina) op. 45 (1995)
 Three Preludes for piano op. 46 (1994-95)
 Les contrastes (Piano trio No. 2) op. 47 (1995)
 Fantasy for trumpet and organ op. 48 (1991/95/rev. 2005)
 Symphony No. 4 (Classical Symphony "Sturm und Drang") op. 49 (1995)
 Suite No. 4 op. 50 for cello solo (1994/96)
 Concertante symphony for two pianos and string orchestra op. 51(1995-96/rev. 2006)
 A Prayer, for viola (or violin, or cello) and orchestra) op. 52 (1994/96-97)
 Sonata No. 2 for solo violin op. 53 (1996)
 Sonata notturna (Piano trio No. 3) for violin (or flute), cello (or viola) and piano, op. 54 (1996/
 rev. 97)
 Symphony No. 5 (Concerto for orchestra) op. 55 (1996-97)
 Fleur et le miroir magique (Fleur and the magic mirror), children opera, op. 56 (1996-97)
 String Quartet No. 5 op. 57 (1997)
 Mondorf Sonatina, for two woodwinds, op. 58 No. 1 (1997)
 Mondorf Sonatina, for solo clarinet, op. 58 No 2 (1997)
 Cinq motets de souffrance et de consolation (Five Motets for mixed a cappella chorus) op. 59
 (1998)
 Symphony No. 6, for large orchestra, op. 60 (1998)
 Concerto da camera, for clarinet and string quartet or string orchestra, op. 61(1998)
 Nisi Dominus (Motet for a cappella mixed chorus) op. 62 (1998)
 Concerto for flute and orchestra op. 63 (1999)
 Benedicat Israël Domino (Mistic Triptych for a cappella mixed chorus) op. 64 (2000)
 Trumpet concerto No. 2 "Im Angedenken J. S. Bachs", for trumpet and string orchestra, op. 65
 (2000)
 Divertimento for violin, piano and orchestra op. 66 (1999-2000)
 Sonata da camera, for viola (or violin, or cello, or flute, or clarinet, or alto saxophone) and piano,
 op. 67 (1977/97-2000)
 Sonata Corta (Piano Sonata No. 1) op. 68 (1978-79/2003)
 L'enfance de l'Art, (Seven youth pieces for piano), op. 69 No. 1 (1976-79/rev. 2000-03)
 Cahier pour Eloi (Four piano pieces for young players), op. 69 No. 2 (1977-78/rev. 2000-01)
 Little dodecaphonic variations, for piano, op. 69 No. 3 (1979)
 Sonata variata, for solo viola, op. 70 (2000-01)
 Suite No. 5 op. 70b for cello solo (after Sonata variata)
 O Lux Beatissima (Motet No. 7 for a cappella female chorus) op. 71 (2001)
 Sinfonietta for string orchestra op. 72 (2001)
 Night Music, for clarinet and cello, op. 73 (2001)
 Notturmo, for oboe solo and string orchestra, op. 74 (2001)
 Sonata No 2 for violin and piano op. 75 (2002)
 Elegy op. 75b (second movement from Sonata No. 2 op. 75)
 Kol Nidrei Sonata (Sonata No. 3 for violin solo) op. 76 (2002)
 Isiltasunaren ortzadarra (Cantata no. 5, for mezzo soprano, mixed chorus and orchestra) op. 77
 (2001-02)
 Heriotzetik Bizitzera (Two choruses from Isiltasunaren ortzadarra, for a cappella mixed chorus)
 op. 77b
 Beatus Vir (Motet No. 8, for a cappella mixed chorus) op. 78 (2002)
 Three Nocturnes, for flute and string trio, op. 79 (2002)
 The four seasons (Four concertos for oboe (or violin) and (alternatively) violin, viola and cello
 and string orchestra) op. 80 (2000-11)

Ach das ich Wassers genug hätte, for counter tenor (or mezzo soprano) and string orchestra (or viola consort, or cello ensemble) op. 81 (2002)
Ach das ich Wassers genug hätte (Motet No. 9, for a cappella mixed chorus) op. 81b (2002)
Sonate d'Yver, for two cellos, op. 82 (2002-03)
Concerto No. 3 for violin and orchestra op. 83 (1999-2000/2002-03)
Sinfonia concertante (for cello and orchestra) op. 83a (after Concerto No. 3)
Suite for Wind octet op. 83b (2003) (after Concerto No. 3)
A Short Overture, for orchestra, op. 84 (1978/2002-03)
Elégy in memoriam D.S.C.H, for string orchestra, op. 85 (2003/rev. 06/12)
Elégy in memoriam D.S.C.H, for orchestra, op. 85b (2003/rev. 06/12)
Stabat Mater, for a cappella mixed chorus, solo violin and soprano solo, op. 86 (2003)
Cantata Vivaldiana (Cantata No. 6 on Nisi Dominus), for counter-tenor (or mezzo soprano) and string orchestra, op. 87 (2003-04/rev. 10-11)
Suite No. 6 for cello solo, op. 88 (2004)
Partita for Orchestra (after the Suite No. 6) op. 88b (2004)
Partita concertante (after the Partita), for flute (or oboe, or clarinet, or bassoon) and string orchestra (or string quartet), op. 88c (2004)
Partita da camera (after the Partita concertante), for flute (or oboe, or clarinet, or bassoon) and string trio, op. 88d (2004)
L'arbre à musique ou les aventures de Séraphine (Musical tale for narrator and small orchestra) op. 89 (2004)
Nocturne for cello and string orchestra op. 90 (2004)
Prelude and Fugue, for piano op. 91 (2004)
Twelve Pascalian Monologues, for flute (or oboe) solo, op. 92 (2004)
Miserere (Motet No. 10 for a cappella mixed chorus) op. 93 (2004)
Meditation after a theme from Beethoven, for cello ensemble, op. 94 (2004)
Diletto classico, for piano (Baroque suite - Sonatina classica - Arioso barocco a fuga monodica a due voci) op. 100 (2006-07)
Variations sérieuses (String quartet No. 7) op. 101 (2006-07)
Meditation on a chinese theme, for Ehru and orchestra, op. 102 (2006-07)
Deux Esquisses lyriques for piano, op. 103 (2006-07)
Deux Esquisses lyriques for cello and piano, op. 103b (2006-07)
Nocturne for the left hand, for piano, op. 104 (2007)
Piano Sonata No. 2, op. 105 (2007:rev. 08/10)
Sonata/Meditation, for violin (or viola, or cello) solo op. 106 (2008)
Via Crucis, Variations for large wind orchestra, op. 107 (2008)
Sonatina lirica, for clarinet (or viola, or alto saxophone) and piano (or string quartet) op. 108 No 1 (2008)
Sonatina lapidaria, for clarinet (or viola, or alto saxophone) and piano op. 108 No. 2 (2009)
Monsieur "M", musical tale for narrator and seven players, op. 109 (2008)
Lucifer variations, for viola and bassoon, op. 109 No. 2 (2008/10-11)
Lucifer variations, for cello and bassoon (or two cellos), op. 109 No. 2b (2008/10-11)
Variations faciles, for piano (after Lucifer variations), op. 109 No. 2c (2008/10-11)
Lyric Interlude (A Study in Pastoral Style), for english horn (or flute, or clarinet, or viola), violin and cello op. 110 (2008)
Lyric Interlude (A Study in Pastoral Style), for english horn (or flute, or clarinet, or viola) and piano op. 110b (2008)
Petite musique de nuit (Little Night Music), for alto saxophone (or flute, or clarinet) and piano (2008)
Petite musique de nuit (Little Night Music), for alto saxophone (or flute, or clarinet), violin and cello (2008)
String Quartet No. 8 (Omaggio a Haydn), op. 112 (2008-09)
Hope (Motet No. 11), for female chorus, op. 113 (2009)

Entre terres, for narrator, orchestra and chorus, op. 114 (2009)
Three Impromptus, for flute and piano, op. 115 (2005/09)
Winter's Night (Concerto-Méditation), for violin and string orchestra, op. 116 (2008-09)
Musica concertante, for horn (or viola, or cello) and piano, op. 117a (2008-10)
Musica concertante, for horn (or viola, or cello) and wind orchestra, op. 117b (2008-10)
Musica concertante, for horn and string orchestra, op. 117c (2008-10/12)
Musica concertante, for viola (or cello) and string orchestra, op. 117d (2008-10/12)
Quasi una Fantasia (Concerto for three violins and orchestra), op. 118 (2010)
Melodias de la Melancolia (Four Songs on words by Alvaro Escobar-Molina), for soprano and piano, op. 119a (2010)
Melodias de la Melancolia (Four Songs on words by Alvaro Escobar-Molina), for soprano and orchestra, op. 119b (2010)
Magnificat, for female chorus, two violins and cello, op. 120 (2011)
Métamorphoses for solo cello, op. 121 No. 1 & 2 (2011/2012)
Sonata impetuosa, (Piano Sonata No. 3), op. 122 (2011)
Seasons (Four Intermezzi for piano), op. 123 (2009-11)
Symphony No. 7, for large orchestra, op. 124 (2003/11-12)
Symphonic Fragments (Overture for large orchestra), op. 124a (2011)
Funeral Ode in memoriam Maurice André, for six trumpets, op. 125 (2012)
Drei Romantische Liebesgesänge, for voice and piano, op. 126 (2012)
Four Elegies, for cello and piano, op. 127 (2012)
Sonata No. 2 for cello and piano, op. 128 (2012)
Cosi Fanciulli, opera (in progress), op. 129 (2012-13)

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