

More

[Robert's Link Tree](#)[About Us & Contact Us](#)[Twitter: @RobertHugill](#)[Live reviews archive](#)[CD reviews archive](#)[Interviews archive](#)

Live reviews

- **Sonic & dramatic splendour:** Jonathan Cohen, Arcangelo & a strong cast demonstrate the richness to be found in Handel's *Saul* to open the London Handel Festival
- **Epic Theatre?:** ENO's incoming music director, André de Ridder at the helm for Brecht & Weill's tricky piece of operatic music theatre, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*
- **A lightness of touch yet shot through with seriousness:** a new *Marriage of Figaro* at Opera North with an engaging sense of ensemble
- **The power of the ordinary:** Phyllida Lloyd's wonderful, stripped-back version of Britten's *Peter Grimes* revived at Opera North with a fully rounded performance from John Findon as Grimes
- **Sky with the Four Suns:** we get up close and personal with Manchester Collective in the Crypt at St Martin-in-the-Fields
- **Fantastical & surreal:** Thaddeus Strassberger's vision of Berlioz' *Benvenuto Cellini* in Brussels anchored by a heroic performance from tenor John Osborn
- **Rhapsodies and Variations:** the current cohort of LSO Conservatoire Scholars show what they are capable of in their showcase recital at LSO St Luke's

In case you missed it

- **Our monthly newsletter**
January on Planet Hugill
Pianists in Lucerne, overlooked Elgar, Arensky songs, forgotten Goldmark, Verdi in Florida

Record reviews

- **Ethel Smyth's *String Trio*:** Trio d'Iroise draw our focus onto this neglected piece on Solaire Records
- **Anonymous no more:** Seven uncredited 16th century works from a choirbook created in Arundel & now residing in Lambeth, here given voice for the first time
- **Reviving the *Queen of Sheba*:** American Romantics record a suite from Goldmark's once-popular first opera
- **A satisfying recital in so many ways:** Katie Bray & William Vann explore the whole of Kurt Weill - *In Search of Youkali*
- **Well-upholstered & rather different:** *On Christmas Night* from London Choral Sinfonia & Michael Waldron on Orchid Classics
- **Enjoying it for its own sake:** there is much we don't know about 17th-century Exeter organist John Luggie but on this new disc William Whitehead leaves us engaged & intrigued

Top four posts this month

Epic Theatre? ENO's incoming music director, André de Ridder at the helm for Brecht & Weill's tricky piece of operatic music theatre, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*The power of the ordinary: Phyllida Lloyd's wonderful, stripped-back version of Britten's *Peter Grimes* revived at Opera North with a fully rounded performance from John Findon as Grimes

Music from Handel's London Theatre Orchestra



A WORLD OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

www.planethugill.com

Planet Hugill

The online classical music magazine from composer Robert Hugill

Classical music news, reviews, interviews & features

Wednesday, 25 February 2026

Catching lightning: Solomon's Knot explore George Jeffreys & the birth of the English Baroque at Wigmore Hall

Labels: [concert review](#), [Wigmore Hall](#)

Solomon's Knot at Kirby Hall in 2023

George Jeffreys & the Birth of the English Baroque; Solomon's Knot, James Garnon, Helen Schlesinger, writer & director: Federay Holmes; Wigmore Hall
Reviewed 24 February 2025

A dramatised presentation that brought to life the almost forgotten English composer George Jeffreys and his turbulent times, illuminating his impassioned, Italianate music

George Jeffreys, the most important English Baroque composer between Byrd and Purcell, still remains a name that many have not heard of. But thankfully, he seems to be having something of a moment. In 2024, Solomon's Knot released an album of Jeffreys's music on Prospero Classical [see [my review](#)] and I chatted to organist William Whitehead about his enthusiasm for Jeffreys's music [see [my interview](#)].

Now *Solomon's Knot* has developed a live programme based on Jeffreys's music, collaborating with director and writer Federay Holmes (an associate artist of Shakespeare's Globe) and actors James Garnon and Helen Schlesinger. *George Jeffreys & the Birth of the English Baroque* was performed at [Wigmore Hall](#) on 24 February 2026. The evening wove together works Jeffreys' and other composers with a dramatic presentation of Jeffreys's life with Garnon as the composer and Schlesinger playing his wife and Lady Hatton, the wife of his patron. The singers were Zoe Brookshaw, Clare Lloyd-Griffiths, Kate Symonds-Joy, James Robinson, David de Winter and Jonathan Sells. James Robinson was replacing tenor Thomas Herford who was unwell, though some of Herford's solos were sung by David de Winter.

In her programme note, Federay Holmes points out that if Jeffreys's scores and part books had been lost or destroyed then we would have known him only as the unremarkable Steward of the Hatton family working away at Kirby Hall. Jeffreys's surviving letters to Lord Hatton, Lady Hatton and their son cover the 1630s to the 1680s, yet none mentions music. We know a lot about Jeffreys, relating to his work as steward, and we know the music he was writing and copying. But we have no texts to link the two.

To solve this, and provide context for the audience, Holmes created her dramatised presentation which was anchored by James Garnon's terrific performance as Jeffreys, rightly dominating the stage whether talking or listening to music. There is a sense of impassioned religious devotion to Jeffreys's music allied to his drawing inspiration from the Italian masters whose work his patrons had collected. Holmes's drama provided a convincing context for this. It is worth bearing in mind that for all the power of Jeffreys's music, we have no real idea why he wrote it or for whom, but we have to assume that the household at Kirby Hall included suitable singers for his pieces. These are no Jacobean consort songs in the English manner but draw genuine inspiration from the Italian composers in a way that was remarkable.





London, ca.1740: Handel's musicians: wonderfully engaged performances from La Réveuse as they explore works by the musicians of Handel's

orchestra

Blog Archive

▼ 2026 (62)

▼ February 2026 (35)

Catching lightning:

Solomon's Knot explore George ...

A significant commitment to bringing orchestral mu...

What began as a record of performances has become ...

Bringing music & art into a space which belongs to...

One of the few operas by a woman produced at the P...

Keeping it local: David Butt Philip & Friends Gala...

A busy summer: from touring The Marriage of Figaro...

Leonardo Vinci's *Artaserse* in Chicago: Haymarket O...

Farewell to a legendary singer: José van Dam, the ...

Sonic & dramatic splendour: Jonathan Cohen, Arcang...

Handel through Mozart's eyes: Handel Hendrix House...

Britain's longest-established string quartet? Sacc...

Shake Up & Smell the Rain featuring children from ...

Epic Theatre? ENO's incoming music director, André...

Sir Alexander Gibson: Scottish Opera, Royal Scotti...

Violinist (and media sensation) Esther Abrami cele...

A lightness of touch yet shot through with serious...

The power of the ordinary: Phyllida Lloyd's wonder...

Sky with the Four Suns: we get up close and person...

Tosca in Oxford: Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra lau...

Miracles & Mysteries: the 2026 Beverley & East Rid...

Frederick Waxman & Figure are Side by Side again, ...

Deidamia, Messiah, 20 years of the festival orches...

Alice's Adventures Underground, Puccini's Golden G...

Fantastical & surreal: Thaddeus Strassberger's vis...

Hyperion Records celebrates The Romantic Piano Con...

The vision of a healthier, higher-achieving future...

Ethel Smyth's String Trio on Solaire records: Trio...

The drama took us from Jeffreys's early years in Oxford leading into the period when King Charles took the Court there, then the King's execution and Jeffreys's appointment as Steward at Kirby. This led to disquisitions on Parliament and Puritanism, the financial problems when the Hattons estates were sequestered, and the later period when King Charles II was restored but Lord Hatton remained out of favour and Jeffreys never got a place at Court.

Sometimes Holmes's imagination seemed to include wilder flights of fancy - did we really need Lady Hatton fantasising about what the spirits of King Charles I and his brother Prince Henry would say to each other in the afterlife? But anchoring it all was a powerful and highly believable portrait of Jeffreys himself as incarnated by Garnon, ably supported by Schlesinger in various roles.

Musically we began with Byrd, and an English contrafactum of *Civitas sancti* which helped set the musical world that Jeffreys arose from. The penultimate piece in the whole programme was Purcell's *Sonata in Three Parts No. 1 in G minor*, one of the set that Purcell had published and which were amongst the final things that Jeffreys copied.

In between was a whole range of his work. Threading their way through the programme were his settings of English poetical religious texts (mainly anonymous) - *How wretched is the state; A Music Strange (Pentecost); Whisper it easily (Passiontide); The Lord in Adversity; Look up, all eyes (Ascension)*. Intimate works for four or five singers and continuo, whilst they might seem to fit in the tradition of the English consort song there was little of that here. Instead, Jeffreys's Italian influences were to the fore and these evoked very much the Italian madrigal. Yet what was also fascinating was the way that, no matter how intense the main body of the work, Jeffreys could find an element of radiance or passionate intensity in the closing pages. In a world where public music was largely forbidden and private music highly controlled, there must have been something wonderful about sitting in the Great Hall at Kirby and hearing a highly personal performance of these pieces.

Jeffreys's Italianate roots were also apparent in the cantata *Felice pastorella (Happy the shepherdess)* with its Italian text and writing for three soloists - tenor David de Winter, bass Jonathan Sells and soprano Clare Lloyd-Griffiths. David de Winter, standing in for Thomas Herford and using music, did an excellent job and all three soloists were engaging in this piece which seemed to be Jeffreys emulating the Italian masters whose music was in the Kirby library. The other non-English language piece was the Latin texted *O quam jucundum* for four voices and continuo. Despite the liturgical Latin text, the piece sounded much more like a madrigal and received a vibrant performance. I noted that the singers were using non-standard, presumably period pronunciation for the Latin.

Overall, I thought perhaps that the balance could have been tipped in favour of the music more with slightly less spoken passages. Also, I felt that some details in Holmes's drama were tricky to apprehend and it seemed to be assumed that you had read and digested her comprehensive programme note first.

But this was a fascinating and engaging experiment that succeeded in bringing a relatively forgotten English composer to life. I do hope that Solomon's Knot's espousal of Jeffreys's music will lead to all manner of further performances.

Never miss out on future posts by following us

The blog is free, but I'd be delighted if you were to show your appreciation by buying me a coffee.

Elsewhere on this blog

- **Vinci's *Artaserse* in Chicago:** Haymarket Opera Company's Craig Trompeter on countering the tendency for audiences to only listen to music that they know - [interview](#)
- **Sonic & dramatic splendour:** Jonathan Cohen, Arcangelo & a strong cast demonstrate the richness to be found in Handel's *Saul* to open the London Handel Festival - [concert review](#)
- **Epic Theatre?** ENO's incoming music director, André de Ridder at the helm for Brecht & Weill's tricky *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* - [opera review](#)
- **A lightness of touch shot through with seriousness:** a new *Marriage of Figaro* at Opera North with an engaging sense of ensemble - [opera review](#)
- **The power of the ordinary:** Phyllida Lloyd's wonderful, stripped-back version of Britten's *Peter Grimes* at Opera North with John Findon - [opera review](#)
- **Sky with the Four Suns:** we get up close and personal with Manchester Collective in the Crypt at St Martin-in-the-Fields - [concert review](#)
- **Fantastical & surreal:** Thaddeus Strassberger's vision of Berlioz' *Benvenuto Cellini* in Brussels anchored by a heroic performance from John Osborn - [review](#)
- **Ethel Smyth's String Trio on Solaire records:** Trio d'Iroise draw our focus onto this neglected piece - [record review](#)
- **Home**

Posted by Planet Hugill at [Wednesday, February 25, 2026](#)



No comments:

