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NIMROD BORENSTEIN

Shakespeare Songs
Mandolin Concerto
Oboe Concerto



SARAH FOX *soprano*

ALON SARIEL *mandolin*

SANJA ROMIĆ *oboe*

NIMROD BORENSTEIN *conductor*

**ENGLISH
CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA**

This album celebrates the powerful and dynamic relationship between soloist and orchestra. I find this form endlessly inspiring – where both the soloist and the orchestra hold equal importance, each enhancing the other. I would add to this that having a single instrument – or voice – facing a full orchestra gives the form an epic, almost theatrical quality. It can become a moment of confession, or of confrontation – a personal voice rising against, or carried by, a collective force.

The three works presented here were composed between 2023 and 2024. Though varied in character, they share a common spirit: each is a multi-movement piece of approximately 20 minutes, and each delves deeply into the interplay between soloist and ensemble. Despite these shared traits, the contrasts are striking. Two of the pieces are concertos, while the third is a song cycle. Their structures range from two to five movements, and the atmosphere of each work inhabits its own distinct emotional world. Together, they reflect my fascination with the diverse ways this musical partnership can unfold.

The **Concerto for mandolin and orchestra** was commissioned by Stichting MusicaNostra. Alon Sariel, who is also the soloist on this album, premiered it in Germany with the Thüringen Philharmoniker on 21 December 2023.

Most people imagine the mandolin to be a delicate, quiet and soft instrument. However, nothing could be further from the truth regarding its actual potential – though it is certainly capable of those qualities. My goal in composing this concerto was to create a work that feels monumental in scope while showcasing the virtuosic capabilities of the mandolin. The instrument has the same four strings as the violin and therefore similar possibilities for the left hand. I explored many of the technical ideas and expressive tools pioneered by Paganini for the violin, adapting them to the mandolin's unique sound.

The first movement of the Mandolin Concerto begins with a dynamic and mysterious opening: a bar of ricochet bowing in the strings, accompanied by off-the-beat timpani, is immediately followed by a question-and-answer dialogue first between the languorous, short melodies of the clarinet and pizzicato (plucked) strings and then between the flute and the pizzicato strings. This driving, forward-moving energy leads to the entrance of the solo mandolin, which takes the ricochet bowing theme from the beginning and develops it further. Following the dramatic opening, the mandolin takes the short motif introduced by the pizzicato strings and transforms it into a longer phrase of twinkling high notes – more in line with the sound we traditionally associate with the mandolin. However, this relative calm does not last, as the same motif becomes increasingly agitated through a rhythmically complex juxtaposition of fast quintuplets of semiquavers in the mandolin, clashing with the orchestral accompaniment. This agitated passage leads into a long, lyrical and emotionally intense phrase played by the orchestral strings. As the movement unfolds, it contains many passages bursting with manic energy, interspersed with moments of lyricism and otherworldly beauty. It concludes with a striking juxtaposition: the mandolin returns to the ricochet bowing theme while the pizzicato strings push their motif higher and higher before gently descending. The mandolin has the final word, bringing the movement to a peaceful close – alone and serene.

The second movement of the concerto is marked by stark contrasts between the orchestra and the solo mandolin. Highly emotional and tormented orchestral passages are followed by moments of celestial stillness, where the mandolin plays alone or almost alone, accompanied only by delicate pizzicato strings. It is a movement of soliloquies – the mandolin speaking directly to us, telling a melancholic, sorrowful story with simplicity and quiet dignity.

The third and final movement of the concerto could be described as “an evening with Mephistopheles” – a wild, seductive and slightly menacing dance that blurs the line

between charm and danger. It is rhythmically complex, fast and relentless, driven by a pulse that never quite settles. The mandolin navigates this devilish soundscape with dazzling agility, while the orchestra shifts between playful mischief and fiery intensity.

Dramatic contrasts emerge throughout the movement, as the mandolin engages in vivid dialogues with different sections of the orchestra: at times it plays intimately with just the strings, at others it converses with the winds. When the full force of the orchestra – including the brass – erupts, the mandolin falls silent, allowing the orchestra to take centre stage in moments of overwhelming power.

The movement – and the entire concerto – comes full circle with the return of the ricochet bowing theme from the first movement, bringing the story to a rewarding and resonant close.

My **Shakespeare Songs**, Op.101, for soprano and orchestra, were composed in 2024. The premiere took place on 9 March 2025 at London's Cadogan Hall, where I had the pleasure of conducting the English Chamber Orchestra with soprano Sarah Fox as soloist. The song cycle exists in two versions. The first, for voice and piano, was written in 2019 and is simply titled Sonnets, Op.83. In the following years, I felt a strong desire to create another version – this time for orchestra – while keeping the soprano part the same. When I began working on it, I realised it was not just a simple transcription; it required a completely fresh approach, as if I were composing it from scratch. The result was a very different piece, which is why I decided to give the orchestral version a new title and opus number, even though it has the same number of bars and an identical solo part.

I have loved Shakespeare's sonnets for many years, so it felt natural for me to choose a handful of them to inspire my song cycle. Just as I would have several movements in an instrumental piece like a symphony or a concerto, I selected several different sonnets for

my cycle in order to create contrasts. Any piece of a certain length needs contrasts to avoid monotony and boredom, but also to create structure. Before composing, I spent weeks listening to John Gielgud reciting the five sonnets I had chosen. I wanted to live and feel the sound and rhythm of the words and the beauty of the text.

Each of the five songs contains internal contrasts, of course, but I would also say that each of them has a particular flavour. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" conveys a feeling of well-being and contentment as well as the enchantment of pure beauty. "When my love swears that she is made of truth" is essentially light with a touch of humour – even when there are dark clouds they do not linger. Although faster than the first song, it is also much shorter. "Love is..." has a feeling of otherworldliness and exhibits the most extreme change of moods of all the songs in the cycle so far. "For thee, and for myself, no quiet find" is of a similar length to the first song; in contrast with the preceding three, it contains a long instrumental passage in the middle of the piece. To me, it feels like telling a story made up of various episodes. "When in disgrace with fortune" is the last song in the cycle and contains both tragic passages and humour.

The capacity to create depth and drama but also lightness and humour is something I admire in great artists like Mozart and Shakespeare. I hope that the listeners will enjoy the variety of colours and emotions in these five songs.

My **Légende – Concerto for oboe and orchestra** was written for Sanja Romić with the kind financial support of wind instrument manufacturer Buffet Crampon. It was composed in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra and premiered by Sanja Romić at Belgrade's Kolarac Concert Hall on 8 March 2024. Sanja Romić had previously, in 2015, commissioned from me – and subsequently premiered and recorded – a piece for oboe and piano entitled *Duo concertant*, Op.73, so I already knew her playing very well. It was a pleasure to continue our collaboration with this new concerto.

To date, I have written many concertos for a wide range of instruments – including violin, viola, cello, piano, saxophone, bassoon and others – as well as single-movement works for soloists and orchestra. Until now, all of my concertos have followed a three- or four-movement structure. For this Oboe Concerto, I set myself the challenge of writing a two-movement work. I wanted the piece to end with brio, so I chose to make the first movement more introspective, paving the way for the fireworks of the second and final movement.

The concerto's first movement opens with a brief orchestral introduction: a slow, dance-like motif in the cellos and basses, over which the violas, second violins and then first violins unfold a long, languorous phrase. At the very end of this introduction, the woodwinds and brass join the strings, leading to the entrance of the solo oboe, which completes the phrase begun by the strings. This opening feels like a preamble to a tale about to be told – like someone saying, "Let me tell you a story about a legend I once heard" (reflecting the concerto's title: *Légende*). The oboe then takes the theme introduced by the strings and begins to develop it, as if continuing, "This legend began on a certain day of the year...".

The story then unfolds over the next ten minutes, filled with a wide range of contrasting emotions – and with them, shifting dynamics and tempos. The movement concludes with the oboe playing a gentle, slow melody that hovers above light pizzicato strings. There is something both serene and joyful in this ending, like a sunset that feels as if it could be a sunrise.

The second and final movement of the concerto begins with a bang: a brief two-bar introduction featuring loud, thundering timpani interspersed with sharp orchestral chords, followed by the frenetic entrance of the solo oboe. The rest of the movement unfolds like a rondo in terms of emotional character: fast, energetic passages – like those at the start –

alternate with slower, contrasting sections. Structurally, it follows an A–B–A–C–A–D pattern, where the recurring “A” section is always fast and frenetic, while each of the interspersed sections introduces a different mood or texture. Sometimes these contrasting passages are melancholic and reserved; at other times, they are lyrical and extroverted, full of intense emotion. Some moments offer simplicity and calm, while others are marked by hardness and drama.

Toward the end of the movement, the theme that opened the concerto in the first movement makes a return – this time at a slightly faster tempo – creating a sense of narrative closure. The concerto then races to a brilliant, virtuosic conclusion, with the solo oboe dazzling above sharp, rhythmic interjections from the orchestra.

I have often said – and written – that regardless of the piece I compose, I am always searching for beauty and contrast. Human emotions are nothing if not complex – and often contradictory – which may explain why I feel the need for intricacy in my counterpoint and rhythmic writing. I have also come to realise that, for me, music is a form of storytelling. It has a beginning, a journey and an end. The structure of a piece is therefore shaped by the story it tells and the emotions it evokes, so it’s not surprising that each work naturally finds its own unique form.

Even though each of the three pieces on this album contains strong internal contrasts and striking shifts in character, each ultimately possesses its own identity – its own world – or, to return to my earlier analogy, its own “story”. I hope the listener will enjoy journeying through these different worlds and discovering the varied landscapes within them.



Soprano **Sarah Fox** is a winner of the Kathleen Ferrier Award and the John Christie Award, and an Honorary Fellow of Royal Holloway College, University of London. She has sung major roles at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Salzburg Festival, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Bayerische Staatsoper, Cincinnati Opera, Welsh National Opera and Opera North.

Sarah has appeared in concert with many leading orchestras including the Berliner Philharmoniker, London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Czech Philharmonic, Dallas Symphony, Colorado Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic, Vienna Tonkünstler, Camerata Salzburg, Melbourne Symphony and Hong Kong Philharmonic. She has performed many times at the BBC Proms, Edinburgh International Festival and Three Choirs Festival, and at London's Wigmore Hall. She has collaborated with conductors including Sir Simon Rattle, Lorin Maazel, Sir Mark Elder, Vasily Petrenko, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Sir Charles Mackerras, Andrew Manze, John Wilson, Joana Carneiro and Richard Hickox. She is a regular guest on "Friday Night Is Music Night" on BBC Radio 2, and was a judge on BBC 2 Television's *The Choir*.

A substantial discography includes many Gramophone Award nominations and "Editor's Choice" and *BBC Music Magazine* "Choice" accolades. Recordings include Mozart's *Il re pastore* (Aminta), two editions of songs by Poulenc, "The Cole Porter Songbook", Parry Songs, Mahler's Symphony No.4 under Mackerras and Maazel (both with the Philharmonia Orchestra), "That's Entertainment" with the John Wilson Orchestra, Mozart's Requiem (London Mozart Players), Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* (Royal Liverpool

Philharmonic / Andrew Manze), and Parry's oratorios *Judith* (title role) and *Prometheus Unbound* (London Mozart Players / William Vann).

sfoxylady.com

Alon Sariel is an Israeli-born, Vienna-based mandolinist, lutenist and conductor whose artistry defies categorisation. The *Vancouver Sun* praised his "dazzling virtuosity," while *Gramophone* described his *Plucked Bach* series on PENTATONE as "highly poetic," and *Diapason* highlighted his refined continuo playing at the Opéra royal de Versailles.

Equally at home on modern and historical instruments, Sariel has appeared at leading venues such as Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City and Sala São Paulo, and at major festivals including Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Utrecht Early Music, the Handel Festivals in Göttingen and Halle, and the Schubertiade Tamba.

Sariel has collaborated with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, NDR Radiophilharmonie, the Thüringen Philharmonie and the English Chamber Orchestra. His debut recording *Telemandolin* received the *OPUS Klassik* Award for Best 18th-Century Concerto Recording. His recent album *Vienna Mandolin Stories*, recorded with the Kölner Akademie under Michael Alexander Willens, features rediscovered works by Ernest Krähmer alongside music by Mozart, Haydn and Sariel himself. His upcoming *Plucked Bach III* continues his acclaimed exploration of J.S. Bach's music on plucked instruments.



Photo: Julia Wesely

Sariel's repertoire spans from early to contemporary music, often illuminating lesser-known voices between his artistic lodestars Bach and Mozart. Alongside his solo and chamber activities, he increasingly conducts both from the instrument and with the baton.

He serves as Artistic Director of the concert series at 't Huis te Poort (Netherlands), is a committee member of the International Handel Festival Göttingen, and acts as a goodwill ambassador for the animal-welfare organisation Pro Animale.

alon-sariel.com



Sanja Romić is a dynamic soloist, educator, and versatile artist whose work synthesizes a world-class professional background with a modern approach to musical narrative. Hailed by Zubin Mehta for her "musical depth and lovely tone" she is praised worldwide for her expressive oboe sound and charismatic stage presence. She has performed as guest principal oboe upon Maestro Mehta's invitation on his final tours with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Sanja is passionate about new repertoire, and among the pieces she has commissioned is Nimrod Borenstein's Oboe Concerto, *Légende*, whose composition was generously supported by Buffet Crampon and whose world premiere was dedicated by Sanja to the centenary celebration of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra. In addition to works by Miloš Raičković and Airat Ichmouratov, her CD project *Romances & Identity* with pianist Danijel Detoni features a new commission by Serbian composer Irena Popović

Dragović. Influenced by her Balkan upbringing, her debut CD with pianist Fionnuala Moynihan, *Melodies of Nations* (Hedone Records & Metropolis Music) promoted music as a universal language.

Sanja's solo engagements highlight a versatility of styles, with her discography including Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante for Four Winds*, *Légende*, works by Hidas and Cimarosa, Vaughan Williams's *Oboe Concertos* and Ivan Božićević's *Marittimo*, as well as performances with the Macedonian Philharmonic, Salzburg Chamber Philharmonic, Al Bustan Festival Orchestra Academy, Vojvodina Symphony Orchestra, Belgrade Philharmonic, Zagreb Soloists and Ensemble Metamorphosis.

Her strong professional foundation stems from over a decade's experience as Principal Oboist of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra and Ljubljana Slovene National Theatre Opera and Ballet, as well as her guest solo oboe appearances in other international orchestras. She has toured extensively across the US, Europe, South America and China, performing in major venues including Carnegie Hall, the Concertgebouw, the National Center for the Performing Arts, Beijing, and collaborating with distinguished conductors and artists.

Sanja now serves as an Associate Professor of Oboe and the Orchestra Studies for the Woodwinds at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, Serbia and holds masterclasses internationally. She advocates and teaches a holistic approach to music-making within her mentorship-coaching concept, *Playing and Living with Ease*.

Sanja is a Buffet Crampon artist and plays their *Légende* oboe model, whose name inspired the titular concept of Nimrod Borenstein's *Oboe Concerto*.

sanjaromic.com



The past few years have seen a great number of **Nimrod Borenstein's** works being commissioned, recorded and premiered at the most prestigious venues and festivals across the globe, from the Royal Festival Hall and the Royal Opera House in London to the Salle Gaveau in Paris, Carnegie Hall in New York, and Hong Kong City Hall.

Among his high-profile champions, Vladimir Ashkenazy has conducted several of Borenstein's compositions, culminating in the recording of an album of his orchestral works for Chandos (*BBC Music Magazine* "Choice"). Other leading artists to have performed Borenstein's music include: Pascal Rogé, Roberto Prosseda, Dmitry Sitkovetsky, the Quartetto di Cremona, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the Oxford Philharmonic, the Israel Camerata, the Belgrade Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the English Chamber Orchestra.

Nimrod Borenstein is a Laureate of the Cziffra Foundation and an Associate of London's Royal Academy of Music. His substantial catalogue currently numbers more than 100 works including orchestral and chamber music as well as vocal and solo instrumental pieces. He also composed the score for a ballet, *Suspended*, which has received more than 250 performances around the world. In recent years, he has been commissioned to write the obligatory performance pieces for the Hong Kong International Piano Competition (2019) and the International Jeunesses Musicales Competition for violoncello (2020).

Increasingly in demand on the podium, Nimrod Borenstein has various conducting projects underway, currently encompassing orchestras in the UK, Germany, France, Bulgaria, Finland, Brazil and Italy. In the 2024–2025 season, Nimrod started a collaboration with the English Chamber Orchestra as composer and conductor. Following a very successful concert in March 2025, he recorded this CD album of his music with the ECO in July 2025.

Commenting on one of his latest CD albums with SOMM, which included his Piano Concerto, Op.91, *Gramophone* magazine noted that he is “amongst the most recorded of contemporary composers in the UK” and that “his conducting brought vivid playing from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra,” while *OpusKlassiek* hailed him as “an inspired composer but also an inspiring conductor”.

nimrod-borenstein.com

*I would like to extend a special thank you to
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for their generous financial support,
which greatly contributed to the making of this album.*

NIMROD BORENSTEIN

I.

④ Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare: Sonnet 18

II.

⑤ When my love swears that she is made of truth,

I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutored youth,
Unlearnéd in the world's false subtleties.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
And wherefore say not I that I am old?
Oh, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

William Shakespeare: Sonnet 138

III. Love is...

⑥ Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixèd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom:
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

William Shakespeare: Sonnet 116

IV. For thee, and for myself, no quiet find

⑦ Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head,
To work my mind, when body's work's expired:
For then my thoughts, from far where I abide,
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.
Lo! Thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.

William Shakespeare: Sonnet 27

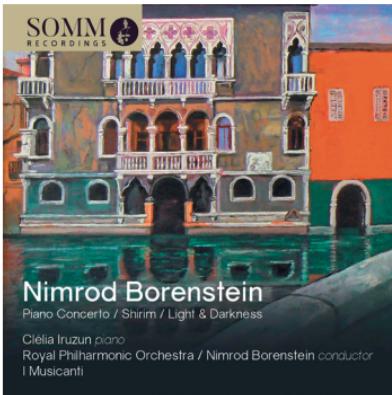
V.

¶ When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

William Shakespeare: Sonnet 29

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FIRST RECORDINGS

NIMROD BORENSTEIN

b.1969

SARAH FOX *soprano* · ALON SARIEL *mandolin* · SANJA ROMIĆ *oboe*

ENGLISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

NIMROD BORENSTEIN *conductor***Concerto for mandolin and orchestra, Op.97**

1	I. Moderato	5:38
2	II. Andante	6:50
3	III. Allegro	7:17

Shakespeare Songs for soprano and orchestra, Op.101

4	I. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	4:54
5	II. When my love swears that she is made of truth	2:44
6	III. Love is...	4:37
7	IV. For thee, and for myself, no quiet find	4:00
8	V. When in disgrace with fortune	3:45

Légende – Concerto for oboe and orchestra, Op.99

9	I. Moderato	10:02
10	II. Allegro	9:23

Total Duration 59:11**Recording:** Henry Wood Hall, London, 26–28 July 2025**Executive & Recording Producer:** Siva Oke**Recording Engineer:** Adaq Khan**Editing:** Nimrod Borenstein**Front Cover:** *Citrons VI, Jaune et bleu* (1992) [detail].

Alec Borenstein. Oil on canvas No. 696.

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