

Ben Smith | Pianist and Composer

Short Biography

Ben Smith is a London-based composer and performer specialising in contemporary music. He is interested in – amongst other things – phenomenological and semiotic approaches to musical analysis, and compositional encounters with silence and repetition. Ben graduated from City, University of London in 2015, and is currently a Junior Fellow at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he previously studied with Laurence Crane, Rolf Hind, and James Weeks. His recording of Evan Johnson's complete piano music was released on *all that dust* in November 2021.

www.bensmithmusic.co.uk

Long Biography

Ben Smith is a London-based composer and performer specialising in contemporary music. His compositions and writings are often concerned with phenomenological and semiotic approaches to material and repetition, the foregrounding of silence as a formal parameter, and objects from visual art and poetry (recent works have involved research into Hokusai, Bashō, Sappho, Agnes Martin, and Old English laments). His music has been featured on Score Follower (*islands*) and One Glass Eye Records (*thirty-six views of the same thing*), and his performances have been featured numerous times on BBC Radio 3. Recent projects have included works for EXAUDI and Ensemble Plus-Minus. As a pianist, he is known for daring and virtuosic performances which traverse the extremes of the contemporary repertoire, ranging from New Complexity to Wandelweiser. He has performed across the UK and internationally, including London venues Ambika P3, Barbican Hall, Hackney Round Chapel, Kings Place, Milton Court Concert Hall, St John's Smith Square, and Wigmore Hall. Ben graduated from City, University of London in 2015, and is currently a Junior Fellow at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he previously studied with Laurence Crane, Rolf Hind, and James Weeks (winning the Tracy Chapman Prize for his composition *alone; silently*). He has given world and UK premieres by Peter Ablinger (Silk Street Music Hall), Patrícia Sucena de Almeida (Transit: Festival voor nieuwe muziek), Michael Finnissy (Michael Finnissy at 70), Anders Hillborg (BBC Total Immersion), Eva-Maria Houben (Borough New Music), Evan Johnson (Cafe OTO, Silk Street Music Hall), Ragnar Kjartansson (London Contemporary Music Festival), Helmut Lachenmann (BPSE), and Rebecca Saunders (Musicon, Durham University). Recording projects include works by Brian Ferneyhough and Alastair White (*métier*), and the complete piano works of Evan Johnson (*all that dust*).

www.bensmithmusic.co.uk

Qualifications in Music /Educational History

2020-2022 – Junior Fellowship, Guildhall School of Music and Drama

2018-2020 – ArtDip (Dist.), Guildhall School of Music and Drama (Scholarship in Piano)

2016-2018 – MPerf (Dist.), Guildhall School of Music and Drama (Scholarship in Piano)

(Tracy Chadwell Prize for Composition for Voice) [Voiceworks]

2012-2015 – BMus (Hons), Class I, City University London

(The Worshipful Company of Musicians Prize for the Outstanding Undergraduate Final-Year Major Project in Music Technology and Applied Studies) [Composition and Performance]

2012 – ARCO, Royal College of Organists

2007 – LTCL (Distinction), Trinity College London, Piano

Employment History

2021 – Musical Director/Piano, *RUNE*, Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival

2019-2021 – BMus Piano Composition Workshop, Durham University

2018-2021 – Workshop Accompanist, City, University of London

2018-2021 – ‘Writing for the Contemporary Piano’, Composition Seminar and Workshop, GSMD

2018-2021 – Teacher, London Piano Institute

2018 – Piano/Keyboard, *4.48 Psychosis*, Royal Opera House production

2018 – Serenade (dir. Sasha Owen), Playback Film Festival

2017-2018 – Jazz & Improvisation Ensemble Teacher, Accompanist, City, University of London

2017 – Piano, London Sinfonietta Academy

2015-2016 – Concerts Assistant, City, University of London

2012 – Accompanist, *The Choir: Sing While You Work*, twentytwenty productions

2011-2012 – Keyboard Player/Programmer (*Chess*, *Hairspray*), Aberystwyth Arts Centre

2011 – Musical Director (*Sweeney Todd*), Manchester School of Theatre

2010-2012 – Music Teacher, Ensemble Director, Accompanist, Bolton School Boys’ Division

Writings

Evan Johnson, lists, little stars: complete piano music 2003-2020 (liner notes)

Music We'd Like to Hear (Review). *TEMPO: A Quarterly Review of New Music* (January 2018)

Masters Thesis: *Images of Nothing: Notes Towards a Semiotic Phenomenology of Silence*

Undergraduate Dissertation: *L'image sonore?: Images, Objects, and Signs, and their Application in Musical Interpretation*

Composition History

Previous teachers include Newton Armstrong, Laurence Crane, and James Weeks

Recent works:

crane \ snow

piano, tape

first performance: St Giles Cripplegate, 18 Oct 2021

islands (twelve views of a similar thing)

piano, tape

first performance: Durham University, 07 Jun 2021

thirty-six views of the same thing

bass clarinet, violin, cello, electric guitar, percussion

first performance: GSMD Music Hall, 29 Jun 2018

performers: Plus-Minus Ensemble

alone; measuring (sonnet)

soprano, mezzo, countertenor, tenor, tenor, bass

first performance: GSMD Music Hall, 25 Jan 2018

performers: EXAUDI

[video and audio examples, along with a full work list, can be found at:
<http://www.bensmithmusic.co.uk>]

Performance History

Previous teachers include Rolf Hind and Ian Pace

Recent Performances:

**World premiere *UK premiere

14 Nov 2021

all that dust: lauch party

Cafe OTO

Sandrin arr. Hernando de Cabezón – *doulce mémoire*

Evan Johnson – *mes pleurants*

Josquin arr. Luis de Narváez – *milles regretz*

18 Oct 2021

Festival of Laurence Crane: A Tribute Concert

St Giles Cripplegate

Ben Smith – *crane \ snow***

17 Aug 2021

Tête à Tête: RUNE

Hackney Round Chapel

Alastair White – *RUNE***

07 Jun 2021

MUSICON: Ben Smith | eternal returns

Durham Univeristy

Charlie Usher – *So calm and don't want to end*

Rebecca Saunders – *Withinnan**

Eric Egan – *siúil go ciúin***

Sylvia Lim – *flare****

Evan Johnson – *mes pleurants****

Ben Smith – *islands****

Lawrence Dunn – *for piano (dancing)*

[a full performance history can be found at: <http://www.bensmithmusic.co.uk>]