

# 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 from Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2018, where he studied with Laurence Crane, Rolf Hind, and James Weeks.

[www.bensmithmusic.co.uk](http://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). Recent projects have included works for EXAUDI (*alone; measuring*), and Ensemble Plus-Minus (*thirty-six views of the same thing*). 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. Ben graduated from City, University of London in 2015, and from Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2018, where he 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 (GSMD Music Hall), Patrícia Sucena de Almeida (Transit: Festival voor nieuwe muziek), Michael Finnissy (Bright Futures, Dark Pasts: Michael Finnissy at 70), Eva-Maria Houben (Borough New Music), Ragnar Kjartansson (London Contemporary Music Festival), Helmut Lachenmann (BPSE), Laurence Osborn (Filthy Lucre), Charlie Usher (An Assembly), and Rasmus Zwicki (Wigmore Hall). His first solo recording (Evan Johnson: Complete Piano Works) will be released on *all that dust* in 2020.

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## **Qualifications in Music /Educational History**

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

2016-2018 – MMus /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**

2019 – BMus Piano Composition Workshop, Durham University

2018-2019 – Workshop Accompanist, City, University of London

2018-2019 – ‘Writing for the Contemporary Piano’, Composition Seminar and Workshop, GSMD

2018-2019 – Teacher, London Piano Institute

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

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 Armstring, Laurence Crane, and James Weeks

### **Work list:**

#### ***islands (twelve views of a similar thing)***

piano, tape

first performance: forthcoming

#### ***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

#### ***burnt***

solo piano

first performance: City, University of London, 20 Apr 2018

performer: Ian Pace (piano)

***traces of oil (night music)***

solo cello

first performance: Borough New Music, 7 Nov 2017

performer: Yoanna Prodanova (cello)

***alone; silently***

female voice, string trio

first performance: Wigmore Hall, 23 May 2017

performers: Patricia Auchterlonie (voice), Ionel Manciu (violin), Alex McFarlane (viola),  
Yoanna Prodanova (cello)

[Tracy Chapman Prize for Composition]

***destroyed autumns, talking***

piano, cello, tape

first performance: GSMD Music Hall, 15 May 2017

performers: Robert Reid Allan (piano), Lucy French (cello)

***some kind of cadence (for Newton)***

solo piano

(February 2017)

***you burn me***

solo piano

first performance (original version): City University Performance Space, 31 May 2016

first performance (revised version): Milton Court Concert Hall, 9 February 2017

performer: Ben Smith

***ecce-imago-hetero***

soprano, countertenor, tenor, bass

first performance: City Summer Sounds, 10 June 2015

performers: EXAUDI

***the ineluctable modality of the audible (Water Music)***

solo piano

first performance (original version): City University Performance Space, 12 June 2014

first performance (revised version): City Summer Sounds, 3 June 2015

performer: Mark Knoop (original version)

[City Summer Sounds Commission]

[video and audio examples can be found at: <http://www.bensmithmusic.co.uk>]

## **Performance History**

Previous teachers include Rolf Hind and Ian Pace

## **Recent and Upcoming Performances:**

\*\*\*World premiere \*\*UK premiere \*London premiere

07 July 2019

### **GSMD Chamber Music Festival**

Milton Court Concert Hall

Béla Bartók – *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*

[with Yundu Wang, Sam Walton, and Aidan Marsden]

24 May 2019

### **Alumni Pianist Concert**

City, University of London

John Adams – *Phrygian Gates*

07 May 2019

### **KLANG (Ben Smith: lines)**

Durham University

Peter Ablinger - *Weiss /Weisslich 17m: Klavier und Alles*

Iannis Xenakis - *Mists*

Evan Johnson - *qu'en joye on vous demaine*

Cassandra Miller - *Philip The Wanderer*

Aldo Clementi - *B.A.C.H.*

Joanna Bailie - *Artificial Environments No. 8*

// interval //

James Weeks - *Matsushima*

Eva-Maria Houben - *lines*

James Weeks - *Matsushima*

John Adams - *Phrygian Gates*

05 May 2019

**LSO Platform: Berlioz 150: Symphonie Fantastique**

Barbican Hall

John Adams - *Phrygian Gates*

02 Mar 2019

**BBC Total Immersion: Ligeti**

Milton Court Concert Hall

György Ligeti - *Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano: Hommage à Brahms*

[with Karen Starkman and Ionel Manciú]

31 Jan 2019

**Music is GREAT: British Embassy Concert Series**

Villa Wolkonsky

Igor Stravinsky – *Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet*

Hans Werner Henze – *Serenade*

Raymond Yiu – *The Pieces for Solo Clarinet*

Pierre Boulez – *Notations I-V*

George Benjamin – *Meditation on Haydn's Name; Relativity Rag*

Kaija Saariaho – *Oi Kuu*

Julian Anderson – *Sensation: Nuits; Alba; Coda*

//interval//

Igor Stravinsky – *Fragment from the Symphonies of Wind Instruments*

Olga Neuwirth – *SPLEEN*

Rebecca Saunders – *Song*

Salvatore Sciarrino – *Melencolia I*

Harrison Birtwistle – *Verses*

Pascal Dusapin – *Ohé*

Conlon Nancarrow – *Three Canons for Ursula*

[with Cecilia Bignall and Scott Lygate]

15 Dec 2018

**LCMF: I contain multitudes**

Ambika P3

Chaya Czernowin - *Day One: On the Face of the Deep*\*\*

Elaine Mitchener - *breadthbreath*\*\*\*

Neil Luck - *Regretfully Yours, Ongoing*\*\*\*

[Jack Sheen: conductor]

27 Nov 2018

**Borough New Music: Featured Instrument (Viola)**

St. George the Martyr Church

Hilary Tann - *The Cresset Stone*

Dobrinka Tabakova - *Whispered Lullaby*

Sadie Harrison - *New Work*\*\*\*

Amanda Harberg - *Philadelphia Suite*

[with Katherine Clarke]

25 Nov 2018

**Filthy Lucre: Digital Fragility**

Redon, Bethnal Green

Tristan Perich - *qsqsqsqsqqqqqqqq*

Matt Rogers - *Vole Sweeps Up!*\*\*\*

Matt Rogers - *Druids vs. the Center for Disease Control*\*\*\*

Thundercat (arr. Joe Bates) - *Bowzer's Ballad*

Matt Rogers - *Small Mammals on the Edge*\*\*\*

Matt Rogers - *Working for the Pea Fox*\*\*\*

Matt Rogers - *Out With the Badger Corps*\*\*\*

[with Siwan Rhys and Joseph Havlat]

01/02/04 Oct 2018

**An Assembly: Autumn Tour 2018**

Manchester: Anthony Burgess Centre,

London: City, University of London

Birmingham: Centrala Cafe

Louis D'Heudieres - *Laughter Studies 6b*

Rowland Hill - *New Work*\*\*\*

Charlie Usher - *An assembly*\*\*\*

[Conductor: Jack Sheen]

03 Aug 2018

**Tête-à-Tête: WEAR**

The Crossing, 1 Granary Square

Alistair White – *WEAR*\*\*\*

27 Jul 2018

**BPSE Summer Festival: Ben Smith**

Regent Hall

Cassandra Miller – *Philip the wanderer*

Ludwig van Beethoven – Sonata No. 21 in C Major, Op. 53 “Waldstein”

Brian Ferneyhough – *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*

Helmut Lachenmann – *Marche Fatale*\*\*

21 Apr 2018

**Occupy The Pianos: On A Queer Day**

St. John’s Smith Square

Nick Bonadies - *(talk and demonstrations)*

Ben Smith - *you burn me*

Michael Finnissy - *Really living*\*\*\*

Robert Reid Allen - *Four Songs from an interview with Peter Maxwell Davies*\*

Kate Honey - *Defiance*

[with Rolf Hind, Andrew Zolinsky, and Nick Bonadies]

19 Apr 2018

**shadows // canons**

GSMD Music Hall

Peter Ablinger - *Klavier und Rauschen*

Iannis Xenakis - *Mists*

Aldo Clementi - *Loure*

Newton Armstrong - *making one leaf transparent, and then another*

Brice Pauset - *Three Canons*

Conlon Nancarrow - *Three Canons for Ursula*

Evan Johnson - *hwi*\*\*\*

Brian Ferneyhough - *Opus Contra Naturam*

[with Newton Armstrong]

24 Feb 2018



**Filthy Lucre: Lingua Ignota**

Hackney Showroom

David Bowie/Brian Eno – *Warszawa*

Claude Vivier - *Do You Believe In The Immortality Of The Soul?*

Hildegard of Bingen (arr. Joe Bates) – *O Orzchis Ecclesia; O Virga Mediatrix*\*\*\*

Iannis Xenakis – *Nuits*

Laurence Osborn - *ELITE*\*\*\*

Hildegard of Bingen (arr. Joe Bates) - *Nunc Apervit Nobis; Quia Ergo Femina*\*\*\*

Cocteau Twins - *Heaven Or Las Vegas*

Talking Heads - *Double Groove*

The Police - *Masoko Tanga*

Talking Heads - *Crosseyed And Painless*

Talking Heads - *The Great Curve*

Talking Heads - *I Zimbra*

10 Dec 2017

**BBC Total Immersion: Esa-Pekka Salonen**

Milton Court Concert Hall

Esa-Pekka Salonen - *Dichotomie* (2000)

03 Dec 2017

**LCMF: Ragnar Kjartansson**

Ambika P3

Ragnar Kjartansson – *An die Musik* (2012)\*\*

28 Nov 2017

**Borough New Music: Haikus**

St. George the Martyr Church

Eva-Maria Houben - *Haikus for four (I, V, VIII, IX)*\*\*

21 Nov 2017

**Borough New Music: Sensations**

St. George the Martyr Church

Robert Reid Allen - *The Palace of Light*\*

Conlon Nancarrow - *Three Canons for Ursula*

Julian Anderson - *Sensation*

14 Nov 2017

**Borough New Music: Saariaho-Haas-Emmerson**

St. George the Martyr Church

Kaija Saariaho - *Lonh*

Georg Friedrich Haas - *Ein Schattenspiel*

Simon Emmerson - *Time Past IV*

07 Nov 2017

**Borough New Music: Last Words**

St. George the Martyr Church

Salvatore Sciarrino - *Due melodie per soprano e pianoforte*

Ben Smith - *traces of oil (night music)*\*\*\*

Kate Soper - *Only the words themselves mean what they say*\*\*

Salvatore Sciarrino - *Ultime rose* (from *Vanitas*)

21 Oct 2017

**BBC Total Immersion: Julian Anderson at 50**

Milton Court Concert Hall

Julian Anderson – The Colour of Pomegranates

Van Gogh Blue

Alhambra Fantasy

20 Oct 2017

**Heaven is Shy of Earth: Julian Anderson at 50**

GSMD Music Hall

Julian Anderson – *Sensation*

18 Sep 2017

**This is Rattle: Adès**

Milton Court Concert Hall

György Kurtág - *Életút (Lebenslauf)*

14 Jul 2017

**Musicians of Tomorrow: London Sinfonietta Academy Showcase**

The Platform Theatre, Central Saint Martins

Tansy Davies - *Iris*  
Magnus Lindberg - *Jubilees*  
Gérard Grisey - *Modulations*  
Simon Steen-Andersen - *Chambered Music*  
Oliver Knussen - *Coursing*  
Rolf Wallin - *Appearances*

16 Jun 2017

**Ben Smith: Ferneyhough-Furrer-Lachenmann**

Milton Court Concert Hall

Brian Ferneyhough - *Opus Contra Naturam*  
Beat Furrer - *Voicelessness. The Snow Has No Voice*  
Helmut Lachenmann - *Serynade*

23 May 2017

**Voiceworks**

Wigmore Hall

Ben Smith - *alone; silently*\*\*\*  
Rasmus Zwicki - *fly little birdie*\*\*\*

06 May 2017

**Occupy The Pianos: Americanaargh**

St. John's Smith Square

Conlon Nancarrow (arr. Thomas Adès) - *Study No. 7 for Player Piano*  
David Lang - *orpheus over and under*

[with Rolf Hind]

28 Jan 2017

**BBC Total Immersion: Philip Glass at 80**

Milton Court Concert Hall

Philip Glass - *Études* # 6 and #15

19 Jan 2017

**Bright Futures, Dark Pasts: Michael Finnissy at 70**

City University Performance Space

Michael Finnissy - *Wild Flowers*  
Fem ukarakteristiske marsjer med tre tilføyde trioer

Derde symfonische etude\*\*  
Deux jeunes se prominent à travers le ciel (1920)  
his voice/was then/here waiting  
Eighteenth-Century Novels: Fanny Hill  
Duet

[with Michael Finnissy and Ian Pace]

19 Jan 2017

**Bright Futures, Dark Pasts: Michael Finnissy at 70**

City University Performance Space

Michael Finnissy - Stille Thränen  
Zortziko\*\*\*  
'Embraceable You' (from *Gershwin Arrangements*)

29 Oct 2016

**Transit: Festival voor nieuwe muziek**

STUK - Leuven, Belgium

Patrícia Sucena de Almeida - *Vacuum Corporis* (piano piece no. 4)\*\*\*

[with Ian Pace]

31 May 2016

**City Summer Sounds: Images, Objects, and Signs**

City University Performance Space

Salvatore Sciarrino - *Due notturni crudeli*  
Michael Finnissy - 'Midsummer Morn' (from *English Country Tunes*)  
Ben Smith - you burn me\*\*\*  
Evan Johnson - *three reversed movements, to bring destroyed objects back to life*  
Brian Ferneyhough - *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*  
Jürg Frey - *les tréfonds inexplorés des signes pour piano (24-35)*