

# Ronald CENTER

## INSTRUMENTAL AND CHAMBER MUSIC, VOLUME THREE

works including

SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

THREE PRELUDES AND FUGUES

PRELUDE, ARIA AND FINALE

GIGLOT AND TOCCATA

FROM CHILDHOOD

SEVEN PRELUDES

SUITE FOR PIANO

LITTLE CANON

DUET

Tamás Fejes, violin  
Balázs Renczés, cello  
Christopher Guild, piano

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

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# RONALD CENTER Instrumental and Chamber Music, Volume Three

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	<b>Sonata for Violin and Piano</b>	<b>13:03</b>
1	I <i>Allegro</i>	3:43
2	II <i>Andante con espressione</i>	4:29
3	III <i>Allegro feroce</i>	4:51
4	<b>Little Canon*</b>	<b>0:54</b>
5	<b>Duet*</b>	<b>2:24</b>
	<b>Giglot and Toccata</b> (pub. 1988)*	<b>3:28</b>
6	Rumba (Giglot)	2:07
7	Toccata	1:21
	<b>From Childhood</b> (pub. 1988)*	<b>2:58</b>
8	Merry-go-round	0:40
9	The Bogey-man	0:49
10	Doll's Waltz	0:50
11	March	0:39
12	<b>Burlesca*</b>	<b>3:37</b>
	<b>Suite for Piano</b>	<b>13:25</b>
13	I <i>Allegro molto*</i>	5:15
14	II <i>Andante</i> (Children at Play)	6:00
15	III <i>Allegro vivace*</i>	2:10
16	<b>Phantasy</b> (1940)*	<b>7:18</b>
17	<b>Melodie</b> (1942)*	<b>2:25</b>

<b>Seven Preludes*</b>	<b>9:56</b>
18 <i>Allegro</i>	1:00
19 <i>Poco adagio</i>	1:55
20 <i>Vivace</i>	0:49
21 <i>Andante</i>	1:07
22 <i>Allegro</i>	1:59
23 <i>Lento</i> (♩ = 48)	1:55
24 <i>Molto allegro (energico)</i>	1:11
<b>Prelude and Fugue in E*</b>	<b>3:18</b>
25 Prelude: <i>Allegretto</i>	1:14
26 Fugue: <i>Allegro moderato</i>	2:04
<b>Prelude and Fugue in G sharp*</b>	<b>2:12</b>
27 Prelude	1:02
28 Fugue	1:10
<b>Prelude and Fugue in A*</b>	<b>4:56</b>
29 Prelude: <i>Allegro molto</i>	2:15
30 Fugue: <i>Allegro ma non troppo</i>	2:41
<b><i>Prelude, Aria and Finale*</i></b>	<b>7:59</b>
31 Prelude: <i>Allegro</i>	2:01
32 Aria: <i>Adagio</i>	2:37
33 Finale: <i>Poco adagio – Allegro</i>	3:21
	<b>TT 77:56</b>
<b>Tamás Fejes, violin</b> 1–5	
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	<b>*FIRST RECORDINGS</b>

## RONALD CENTER'S PIANO MUSIC: A FURTHER LOOK

by Christopher Guild

Ronald Center (1913–73) is among Scotland's major composers, and yet, although this recording is the fifth of his music to be commercially released, he has not become as widely appreciated as he deserves to be. He was born in Aberdeen in 1913, and he was to remain in Aberdeenshire his whole life. The son of an accomplished amateur bagpiper, the young Ronald received tuition in piano, organ and conducting locally from William Swainson and Julian Rosetti (the latter, as Alasdair Grant notes,<sup>1</sup> was a Polish immigrant to Aberdeen in the early twentieth century who once studied piano under Ignacy Jan Paderewski, no less). For reasons unknown, Center never went on to study music at university or in a music academy: after leaving school, he was put to trade as a dispensing chemist. He met the soprano Evelyn Morrison, and they married in 1943. The couple moved to the Aberdeenshire market town of Huntly, near Evelyn's birthplace of Rothiemay, and they remained there for the rest of their lives. For several years Ronald worked as a music-teacher at the Gordon School, quitting his job after a number of years and turning his attention to private teaching, directing the music at a local Huntly church, and pursuing the activity for which he is now known: composition. He wrote for the piano, choirs (with organ and other instruments accompanying), strings and, occasionally, symphony orchestra – in the form of his symphonic poem *The Coming of Cuchulain* (performed, and later destroyed), a symphony (unperformed) and a piano concerto, of which there is a reconstruction of the first movement, based on fragments. As far as is known, he did not write any chamber or solo pieces for wind, brass or percussion. As a largely self-taught composer, with no university-standard training in music, he never gained

<sup>1</sup> 'Ronald Center and his String Quartets', booklet essay with Ronald Center, *Instrumental and Chamber Music, Volume Two: Complete String Quartets*, Toccata Classics TOCC 0533 (2021), p. 3.

the experience of writing for any musical forces other than those which he knew at first hand – and he was, of course, primarily a pianist, choirmaster and organist. He had friendships with string-players, from whom (it might be assumed) he gleaned his knowledge of how to write for such instruments, as the recent survey of his three string quartets by the Fejes Quartet amply proves.<sup>2</sup> His choral writing is highly idiomatic and gratifyingly effective, as demonstrated in a rare recording of his profoundly moving cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem*.<sup>3</sup>

But it was at the piano that Center developed most of his musical thinking: he wrote more piano music than anything else (around two hours' worth). The first album in this Toccata Classics series presented the majority of Center's extant piano works.<sup>4</sup> Over a decade on, this recording presents the rest of them. Putting this recital together has been a fascinating experience, not least since much of the music here is also found in larger works such as the Piano Sonata (c. 1958).

None of Center's music was published while he was alive, and only a tiny amount of it is published now.<sup>5</sup> He was a fiercely private man, intense and extremely shy. One has the impression he might not have been able to handle criticism all that well. One might further assume he did not intend his piano music to be published, and so it was composed for his own fulfilment. That may be the reason none of it is dated, and if there are no dates to work with, it makes not only tracing his stylistic development harder but also placing each work into any clear context.

Many things can be observed about Center's unique way of composing. One aspect which crops up in the works recorded here is that, although there are points at which the keen listener and analyst can detect motivic development, Center doesn't stick around to exhaust his musical material: development doesn't seem to be a chief concern. His music

<sup>2</sup> Toccata Classics TOCC 0533.

<sup>3</sup> Altarus LP AIR-2-9100 (1985).

<sup>4</sup> Recorded on Toccata Classics TOCC 0179, released in 2013.

<sup>5</sup> As of April 2022, the published works are: the Piano Sonata (in an edition by Ronald Stevenson), *From Childhood* and the *Giglot and Toccata* (all by Robertson Publications, 1988) and the String Quartet No. 1 (Novello). Facsimiles of manuscripts are available by the Scottish Music Centre ([www.scottishmusiccentre.com](http://www.scottishmusiccentre.com)). All remaining manuscripts are held in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

is packed with ideas: new themes and motifs appear all the time. One has the sense that each of his pieces is a conglomeration of several sketches, intelligently juxtaposed – and yet, despite there being so many ideas, there is no sense of disunity, and the result is always exciting.

In 1945 Center and his wife had a chance encounter with two Polish soldiers stationed near their hometown of Huntly. One, Witold Nowacki, was a violinist, the other, Kazimierz Łydziański, a cellist. They became friends and it is believed they provided the stimulus for Center to compose much of his string chamber music; one can easily come to this conclusion on hearing, say, the three string quartets and, indeed, the Sonata for Violin and Piano, since it is surely no coincidence that these works have a strong eastern-European musical strain running through them.

Center's Sonata for Violin and Piano also has a fleet-footed, *scherzando* character, which suggests an influence from his exact contemporary, Benjamin Britten (1913–76), though with a touch of the diabolical side of Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924). The opening *Allegro* [1] switches between dancing *scherzando*, melodic wistfulness and foreshadowings of the demonic writing to come in the third movement. Eastern-European music emerges occasionally – especially echoes of that of Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937) – through quasi-Impressionist harmonies and gestures, such as extended trill passages in the violin, alongside Bartókian spikiness. The second movement, *Andante con espressione* [2], is a searching pastoreale. Violin and piano take equal roles through their interweaving melodic lines, the piano providing occasional contrasts of grandeur through a chordal motif based on a Scotch snap. The finale, *Allegro feroce* [3], is a wild tarantella in which the eastern-European character is arguably at its clearest.

It is not documented whether Center composed his violin and cello miniatures, the *Little Canon* [4] and Duet [5], for Nowacki and Łydziański, but given Center's relative isolation from the musical life of Scotland at large, it is highly likely. Both pieces show Center at his most light-hearted and, in the case of the *Little Canon*, his simplest and most charming. The Duet is a particularly fine example of Center's polyphonic writing.

The *Rumba* and *Toccata* were published together by Robertson Publications as *Giglot and Toccata*. Since a giglot is a loose woman, the reason for the name-change from

Center's original Rumba [6] is unclear; I have chosen to retain the title as it appears on the manuscript. That Center should choose a Latin-American dance idiom is a little surprising, in the context of the rest of his *œuvre*. It is an ostinato-based character piece, with some surprising dissonances in the melody. The Toccata [7] is a helter-skelter warm-up for the fingers, *moto perpetuo*, in C major.

*From Childhood* is a group of four very short miniatures, presumably (given their comparative pianistic naturalness) written for children. By extension, one might assume such children were his own pupils: he was a much-liked music-teacher to local children, among whom was a future BBC journalist and presenter by the name of James Naughtie. That Center and his wife remained childless is therefore poignant. After the playfully bitonal 'Merry-go-round' [8], which speeds up markedly towards its wry ending, 'The Bogey-Man' [9] then creeps onto the scene; the music becomes more and more tense, before ending eerily. 'Doll's Waltz' [10] could be heard as a tribute to Prokofiev, with its unexpected but amusing, and expressive, melodic twists and turns. A toy soldier's 'March' [11] leads to the end of this charming set of pieces.

*Burlesca* (marked *Andante, ma rubato – Allegro*) [12] is a humorous whirlwind through a series of musical ideas. The first, in the character of a fanfare, is first heard in its entirety after an intriguing, slow introduction, at 0:44. A second theme, appearing at 1:28, is derived from the fanfare but at this point sounds more like a child's song. At 1:42 a third motif, with hints of a Scottish reel, is heard, its bitonality reminiscent, once again, of Bartók, and also the 'March' from Center's *From Childhood*. Following a further new chordal and syncopated theme at 1:54, yet another idea, paean-like, is introduced at 2:17. It peters out thoughtfully and mysteriously, before heavy, dancing music bursts in. The piece closes with a huge *glissando* plunging to the bottom of the piano – effectively slamming the piano lid shut.

The *Suite for Piano* receives its first complete recorded performance here, the second, central piece, 'Children at Play', having been recorded by Murray McLachlan and released as part of the 'Olympia Explorer' series of CDs in 1990.<sup>6</sup> The first movement, *Allegro*

<sup>6</sup> Murray McLachlan, *Piano Music from Scotland*, Olympia OCD 264 (1990), re-released on Regis Records RRC 1246 (2006).

*molto* [13], is an alternative version of the first movement of the Piano Sonata (c. 1958). The music here is capricious and mercurial, constantly in flux and changing direction every few bars. It matches the Sonata movement exactly for the first two bars, and then in bar 3 new material is heard very briefly in the form of a soaring melody outlining the shape of an arch. The scampering music returns before a brief chorale section, and then a passage with bagpipe drones appears (1:20). It, too, also features in the Sonata, but, in the edition by Ronald Stevenson published by Roberton Publications, there are added minor-second discords to the melody line. Center continues his ever-changing musical journey up until just before where the Sonata transitions back to its recapitulation. In the Suite, at 3:22, he introduces yet another new theme: this time, one which feels like a nursery song. The music is then thrust back to the opening material at 4:14. Center ends the *Allegro molto* in the Suite a tone lower than in the Sonata, in the pitch-centre of A.

Whereas the *Allegro molto* made reference to a nursery song through music of lilting, lyrical character, the second-movement *Andante*, subtitled 'Children at Play' [14], is self-evidently meant to depict a scene in a child's playroom. 'Children at Play' begins in the upper treble register of the piano, suggestive of a wind-up music-box. As the melody progresses, it develops the raised-fourth inflection which Center so often favours in his pieces: it adds brightness to the sound, and it is no coincidence that it is the mode one obtains if one plays an ascending scale on the Great Highland Bagpipe from its lowest note, G, up one octave. This music tails off, and an insistent, discordant *Allegro* takes hold (2:03): the child's imaginary adventure takes off in a new direction. A call to attention is sounded (2:35) before a march begins. Heavy stomping in the lower bass register interrupts the march music. It gives way, abruptly, to a strathspey (3:14).<sup>7</sup> The music then returns to the peaceful setting of the nursery, the music-box having been replaced by a mandolin depicted through sustained upper-register tremolandos.

The influence of Bartók is felt in the closing *Allegro vivace* [15], with constantly changing irregular time-signatures and short phrases interspersed by 'strummed' chords

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<sup>7</sup> A dance originating from Speyside in the eighteenth century. Strathspey tunes are characterised by clipped dotted rhythms, such as those heard here.



and Center's signature triadic dancing fanfare motifs. Bagpipe drones underpin more delicate music in the final section (1:42), creating a *stretto* towards the pugnacious ending so typical of Center's pieces.

An exception to Center's tendency not to date music, and a fine example of a single-movement work composed of numerous musical ideas, is his *Phantasy* [16] of 1940, which is indeed as free-form and rhapsodic as its title suggests. It is also Center's earliest known work. It is an odd work to decipher from the score alone. The best way to describe it, is true to what its title implies, a stream-of-consciousness, a free flow of musical thoughts. There are three discernible sections which flow into one another, though it is tricky to work out, or decide upon, the tempos throughout. Center tends to give little interpretative help in his scores: only scant dynamic markings and some changes in tempo, although the meaning of instructions like *con moto* within a piece marked as *poco lento* isn't clear. Such is the nature of preparing music with no existing performance tradition, especially that of a composer whom one cannot consult.

It opens with a low A natural, an undulating quaver accompaniment drifting along underneath a gently singing treble-register melody. The music drifts through a series of modulations to unrelated keys. The next section is heralded by a sudden, loud chord. The music then picks up pace. Melodic writing then drifts into an extensive section of what feels like improvisation, the pianist slowly finding his or her way from one key to another via broken chords. The following section is mysterious, but becomes plaintive, then unsettled by the introduction of low octave chords, suggesting *pizzicato* cellos and basses. This passage winds down into a chorale-like section with brief, harp-like gestures (broken octave chords), before morphing into a playfully scampering final section which increases in pace to the conclusion.

A short album-leaf, *Melodie* (1942) [17], could almost be a transcription of a song for baritone and piano, with its singing left-hand melody throughout and its tranquil, undulating accompaniment surrounding the 'vocal' line. The difference between this approach and what one can assume to be Center's later style is very clear here. Although this *Melodie* isn't without some harmonic chromaticism, the lack of biting, acerbic polyphony and experiments with bitonality and modes is conspicuous. It makes for

a rare instance of serenity, if with a degree of certain emotional piquancy, in Center's *œuvre*, and is rather delightful for it.

Like many details about Center's compositions, it is not known whether the Seven Preludes recorded here were conceived as a set. There is a makeshift front cover to the manuscript, itself a piece of manuscript paper, with the title *Preludes*. The word 'seven' would appear to have been added later. The first piece, *Allegro* [18], is a headlong dash to its end, a swirling mix of Scottish reel and Bartókian influence, and a fiendish finger etude. It begins modally, based on E flat, before a pugnacious thud on the keyboard (a bitonal E flat minor/C major-based cluster which Center also used several times in the first movement of his Piano Sonata) brings in C major. No. 2, *Poco adagio* [19], is Center at his most noble, a bardic melody set in a choral texture which grows inexorably before retreating to its resting pitch-centre of A flat Mixolydian (a transposition of the mode in which the Great Highland Bagpipe is tuned). No. 3, *Vivace* [20], is another whirlwind of a piece, jazzily scampering down the keyboard into a central section in which the melody, harmonised in thirds, is accompanied by a rapid ostinato. The piece reprises the opening music before a loud ending. No. 4, *Andante* [21], has the feel of a Schubert ländler, but with harmonic and melodic twists and turns more in keeping with a Prokofiev miniature. No. 5, *Allegro* [22], is in three sections, the first based on a repeated-note motif which flurries into arpeggiated triad patterns, before a jaunty 'oom-cha-cha'-style section in which Center constantly wrong-foots the listener. This passage leads into a fast waltz section,<sup>8</sup> the melody of which is a mixture of a trumpet call and a folksong. After the interruption of a long, loud trill, the opening music is reprised and the music moves to a calm, agreeable conclusion. No. 6, *Lento* [23], can be assumed to be the source material for the opening of the second-movement *Adagio* in the Piano Sonata, since it is exactly the same music – that is, up until the first beat of bar 16 (1:15), whereafter the first beat of bar 16 is unique to this Prelude, and not used in the Sonata.<sup>9</sup> No. 7, *Molto allegro*

<sup>8</sup> Waltzes are written in triple time, usually three crotchet beats in a bar. The passage discussed here is written as three *quaver* beats in a bar; but the 'omm-cha-cha' feel of a waltz is quite noticeable.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, at this very point in the manuscript someone, possibly Center himself, has lightly marked a cross (X) over the first melodic note in the bass. If one assumes Center did make this marking, then this was perhaps his way of noting a 'cut' as he reworked

(*energico*) [24], has a similar story to No. 6, in that it found a new lease of life as the first half of the finale of the Piano Sonata. A jig, again with the influence of Bartók keenly felt, it ends with surprising abruptness, where, in the Sonata, the music would transition into a closing section with music suggestive of bagpipes.

The three preludes and fugues were all written separately, without any obvious intention of grouping them together; I have done so here because they flow reasonably well from one to the next. All are entitled, in their respective manuscripts, simply as 'Prelude and Fugue'; Center did not specify a key for any of them. Two, the Preludes and Fugues in G sharp and A respectively, are published in facsimile by the Scottish Music Centre in Glasgow ([www.scottishmusiccentre.com](http://www.scottishmusiccentre.com)), now with front covers indicating the key. The Prelude and Fugue in E is currently available only for consultation at the National Library of Scotland in the collection of Center's manuscripts and various other papers left to the library by his widow. I have added the key, E, to differentiate it from the other Preludes and Fugues.

There are two clear formal consistencies across all three Preludes and Fugues. The first is that they are all very chromatic, not least the Prelude and Fugue in E. It is difficult to argue that any of these pieces have any settled sense of key, since the term 'key' implies a piece of music that is tonal, and necessarily follows the rules and tonal hierarchy of pitches under such a system. Center's music, certainly in what one might assume to be his later works (that is, after the more conservative harmonic territory of the *Phantasy* and *Melodie*) tends to be highly chromatic, bitonal and bimodal. Each of these preludes and fugues takes the general shape of a long, searching argument which resolves itself at the very end with a clear, often forceful, statement of music in the stated pitch-centre of its (posthumous) title. The second formal consistency across all of Center's piano fugues is that they are in two voices only and should therefore arguably be described as fugatos, as they tend not to follow the formal processes of fugues very closely. They are,

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the piece to be part of the Sonata. Should this assumption be correct, it follows that these pieces must have been written before the Sonata.

essentially, intricate two-part inventions, where at the beginning each voice states the theme in turn.

The Prelude [25] of the Prelude and Fugue in E is angular and quirky, interspersed with rapid, Mannheim rocket-style ascending scales. Center's penchant for passages of broken triads in sequence is on display throughout, too. The Fugue [26] is composed of a similarly angular theme, with abrupt shifts in register, and with a countersubject based on consecutive melodic perfect- and augmented fifths, bringing a manic zaniness to the character. The two fugato voices chase each other in what seems to me perhaps the most exciting, perhaps even experimental, example of Center's writing for the piano. It ends in a resolute manner, but in both E major and E minor at the same time (one hand implying major, the other minor), perhaps a nod to the tonal ambiguity of much Busoni, a composer whose music is believed to have been an influence on Center.

It is generally held that the Prelude and Fugue in G sharp was a sketch for the Piano Sonata. The Prelude [27] seems to have been repurposed for the opening of the third movement of the Sonata. In this (probably) earlier version Center takes the music off to an entirely unexpected transition into F major, in which key the Prelude ends. The two-voice Fugue [28] – initially based in the pitch-centre of C, then predominantly around B flat as it progresses – ends with an affirmative G sharp major chord, the only point at which either prelude or fugue is in the key that provides the ostensible title. The Fugue forms the final section of the third movement of the Sonata.<sup>10</sup>

The Prelude and Fugue in A, published as a bound facsimile of the manuscript by the Scottish Music Centre, is entitled simply 'Prelude and Fugue' in Ronald Center's hand at the top of the first page of the score. The key was added posthumously. This piece is like the Prelude and Fugue in G sharp, in that there is no trace of it being in its nominal key until the very last bar of the Fugue – but only the very last chord is, loudly and unambiguously, in A major. The Prelude [29], based around the pitch centre of F sharp, begins *Allegro molto, alla breve*, the lower part of the texture playfully hopping around

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<sup>10</sup> The final chord of the third movement of the Sonata is an octave higher than written in the Fugue discussed here. Robertson's edition, which I used for the previous piano recording in this series (rocc 0179) and for all live performances before and since, is Ronald Stevenson's performing edition; this octave alteration might be his enhancement, not Center's.

while a constant, very rapid upper part keeps up a nervous running figure. After a bold second theme in octaves is stated in the lower part (0:06), the upper figuration relents, morphing into a lyrical cascading figure as the bold lower theme becomes more lyrical. Following a brief *agitato* passage (at 0:29), the music arrives in the Lydian mode of C for a brief interlude of rapid unison chords (0:37). This passage gives way to a more fervent energy, leading back to the second theme of the piece (0:43), and then the first (0:58). What follows is akin to a conventional recapitulation, until the fervent music from a few moments earlier is heard again before a flourishing coda leads to the end.

Like the Prelude, the Fugue [30] begins based firmly in F sharp. After an eight-bar, Shostakovich-like theme is stated at the beginning, the second voice enters in the low bass, in octaves. Both voices then come together in unison, leading to a non-thematic, but structurally important, chordal passage (0:30) which Center uses throughout the piece to bring musical paragraphs to a close. The theme is heard again, this time in the A Aeolian mode and without any of the chromaticism of its initial appearance. This time it is treated canonically at the octave. Suddenly, Center switches to its tonal opposite, E flat minor, but with the theme stated loudly in its original F sharp mode (rather than 'key': there's no key-signature, and though it is clearly conceived in a 'key', the accidentals are written in; it is hard to argue that it has a 'key' in a tonal sense, since Center doesn't use conventional cadences). It is followed by continued interplay between the two voices, the theme re-entering at different points in the statement of the theme by the opposite voice. The music eventually winds down into an unnervingly quiet passage (at 1:23), building in intensity through a repeated minor-second motif. The music continues to the end, where a brief coda based on quartal harmonies closes the piece.

Concluding this survey of Center's complete piano works is the *Prelude, Aria and Finale*. The Prelude [31] is a brisk *Allegro* which starts in the manner of a reel, a furious *moto perpetuo* with loud, punchy chords and bitonal, toccata-like passages, and tumultuous scales such as those which bring the piece to a cataclysmic close. The brooding 'Aria' [32], reminiscent of several of the slower pieces found on the first volume in this series, is followed by a tour-de-force 'Finale' [33], which begins *Adagio*, searchingly, with no clear direction or distinction of pitch-centre. Erupting from an uneasy, eerie short passage is

the main, tumultuous body of the piece, an *Allegro*, wavering triplet quavers dancing above rhythmic bass- and tenor-register writing. The music then dissolves into an extended section of melody heard amidst pulsating duplet quavers, which in turn breaks down to a quirky interlude not unlike two duetting bassoons (2:14). A sardonic tarantella ensues, leading to the end of the piece – and, indeed, the end of this recital.

**Tamás Fejes** has been a member of a number of important orchestras, playing in leading/co-leading positions and working with major conductors and soloists in the UK, Germany and Switzerland. He is currently the Assistant Leader of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. He has been invited to teach, conduct master-classes and coach in summer schools in several universities across the USA, Hungary and UK. Since 2003 he has been a Part Time Lecturer of violin and chamber music at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

In 2006 he founded the Fejes Quartet, with whom he performs at festivals in France, Hungary, Italy and at home in Scotland. They released their debut album in 2011; in June 2014 they recorded Christopher Wright's four string quartets for Nimbus and more recently Ronald Center's complete string quartets for Toccata Classics. As a soloist he has played concertos across Europe. His repertoire includes all the major violin concertos, from Baroque to twentieth-century. In 2016 he recorded Bach's complete Sonatas and Partitas for unaccompanied violin, released on the Discovery Music and Vision label (DMV120).

He was born into a family of musicians in Hungary. At the age of ten he won second prize in the János Koncz national violin competition. He then studied at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, where he gave numerous recitals, as well as some organised by Jeunesses Musicales, and he was invited to give several appearances on radio and television. He moved to London to continue his studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and was an active participant of master-classes, chamber-music seminars and festivals in Germany, Hungary, Spain, the UK and the USA.

<https://tamasfejes.com>



**Balázs Renczés**, born in 1994, began his cello studies at the age of five at the local music school in Hungary. From 1999 to 2008, he took part in numerous competitions, securing victories in the Budapest Cello Competition twice. Additionally, he achieved distinction in international competitions, claiming a third prize in the International Cello Competition in Slovakia, a third prize in the 14th International Cello Competition Giovanni Violoncellisti, and a second prize in the International Cello Competition in Liezen, in Austria.



In 2008, he continued his education at the Preparatory Course of the Exceptionally Talented Students of the Liszt Academy, under the mentorship of György Déri, culminating in 2012. During this period, he won third prize in the International Cello Competition in Liezen in 2010 and secured the first prize in the International Cello Competition 'Agimus' for the Premio Città di Padova in 2011. From 2013 to 2019 he pursued his studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, under the guidance of Robert Irvine and David Watkin. At the age of twenty, he earned a trial for Principal Cello of the Scottish Opera. In 2016, he won first prize of the RCS Classical Concerto Competition and performed for the future king, Charles III, in an event broadcast live by Classic FM. In 2017, he received the Suggia Gift from Help Musicians UK. Since then, he has undertaken several trials in the UK, including positions as Principal Cello of the Birmingham Royal Ballet and Principal No. 3 at the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Since March 2024 he has been Second Principal Cello of the Aalborg Symphony Orchestra in Denmark.

**Christopher Guild** is becoming increasingly well known for his work on the piano music of Scotland and the rest of the British Isles. Hailing from the Speyside region of Moray, he has performed as soloist and chamber musician at some of the most prestigious concert venues in the UK, including the Wigmore Hall, St John's, Smith Square, the Purcell Room and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse.

Following studies at St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh, and as a Foundation Scholar with Andrew Ball at the Royal College of Music, London, his career was launched with invitations to tour the UK under the auspices of the Countess of Munster Musical Trust Recital Scheme, and to perform on the South Bank in London as a Park Lane



Group Young Artist. While still a student, he performed as an orchestral keyboardist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and City of London Sinfonia.

He has worked with numerous composers, among them Judith Weir, and co-founded the Edison Ensemble, a contemporary-music group based in London. After a year's tenure as the Richard Carne Junior Fellow in Performance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, he went on to become Head of Instrumental Music at the Godolphin School in Wiltshire. Based in the south of England, he is a visiting teacher at Dean Close School (Cheltenham), Solihull School (West Midlands) and the Gloucestershire Academy of Music. From 2015 to 2022 he was a teacher of Musicianship, Advanced Theory and Piano at Junior Trinity, the Saturday school of Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. He lectured on Francis George Scott and Ronald Stevenson at the Musica Scotica Annual Conference in 2019, and has written articles on Scottish classical music for *iScot* magazine.

This is his tenth album for Toccata Classics; he has recorded also for Champs Hill Records and Piano Classics. Writing in *International Record Review* the late Calum MacDonald was unstinting in his praise of *Ronald Center: Instrumental and Chamber Music, Volume One* (Toccata Classics TOCC 0179): 'The rhythmic vivacity and crispness of his delivery, the subtlety of his pedalling, the incisiveness of attack with never a hint of heaviness, and his range of keyboard colour are such that I'm sure the composer himself would have applauded.'

[www.christopherguild.co.uk](http://www.christopherguild.co.uk)

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