

intangible classics



Joseph
Sonnabend

instrumental &
chamber works

IXION

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Joseph Sonnabend - Instrumental & Chamber Works

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| 1. | Piano Trio No. 1
<i>Charles Mutter (violin), Ildir Shyti (cello), Antony Gray (piano)</i> | 10:50 |
| 2. | April
<i>Antony Gray (piano)</i> | 2:35 |
| 3. | Mirage
<i>Morgan Hayes (piano)</i> | 3:51 |
| 4. | The Summer Before Last
<i>Ildir Shyti (cello), Antony Gray (piano)</i> | 9:35 |
| 5. | Fluctuations
<i>Charles Mutter (violin)</i> | 10:44 |
| 6. | Song 1 'Dew on the tips of branches' | 2:37 |
| 7. | Song 3 'I am not at home' | 3:07 |
| 8. | Song 5 'How can I break my attachment to the world?'
<i>Emma Tring (soprano), Antony Gray (piano)</i> | 3:22 |
| 9. | Passacaglia
<i>Ildir Shyti (cello), Antony Gray (piano)</i> | 7:32 |
| 10. | Synergism
<i>Charles Mutter (violin), Cora-Marina Iordache (violin)</i> | 8:49 |

Total playing time 63:08

Joseph Sonnabend - Thoughts and programme notes

Having had an extremely successful career as a doctor, specialising in helping and guiding those with AIDS, Joseph Sonnabend kept his passion for composing music somewhat secret and hidden from the world. He loved creating pieces (piano solos, songs and smaller chamber works) for his own enjoyment, and never really expected to hear them performed. The many hand-written manuscript books and scores filled with a wide collection of pieces built up over decades of composing, (now in the Stellenbosch University in South Africa where Joseph was born) were gradually transferred to the Sibelius computer notation system, which he used well. Joseph was very adept and efficient at working with/on computers generally.

When I first met Joseph (then in his mid-80's) through fellow composer Morgan Hayes (who plays the piano piece *Mirage* on this album) we got on well and my immediate thought was to get a selection of his scores up to a performing standard. The notation had been done quickly so that Joseph could basically hear the pieces on the computer and were not processed to be clear for performers to use. I remember him being rather surprised by this idea. I thought this was a worthwhile endeavour and it took some convincing for him to look through the many unfinished pieces and decide which should be focused on. In this process much more composing was done and unfinished pieces were developed and brought to completion, I also asked him to write completely new pieces, such as *Fluctuations* for solo violin and *Synergism* for violin duet so that he could work and be guided directly by violinist, Charles Mutter who performs them on this CD.

Because of his love and openness to serial (12-Tone) composition and chromatic melodies and harmony, much of Joseph's music emanates from composers such as Alban Berg and Arnold Schoenberg in its technical foundations, and is framed in this soundworld. He told me about his parents playing such composers on their 78rpm record player when he was a child and he was accomplished enough on the piano to play the Berg Piano Sonata at an early age. In actual fact he played me a few pages of this sonata quite soon after I met him, showing that this sensibility was firmly rooted and embedded in his creative consciousness over the decades.

The collection of works on this CD encapsulates the Sonnabend soundworld. His passion in writing for piano, stringed instruments and songs is captured here, and he also wrote string quartets and many more solo piano pieces and songs with piano accompaniment.

The *Piano Trio* for violin, cello, piano, quickly presents a chromatic melodic line (initially in bass octaves on the piano) and gradually expands this material in various forms and textural interplay throughout the piece, often referring back to this initial material. The piece ends in mid-air in the sense that it could continue but floats away instead.

April for solo piano is in 6/8 and has a subtle undulating tempo with an interwoven texture that moves between the hands and gives a sense of the start of springtime. *Mirage*, also for solo piano, starts on repeated D crotchets in 4/4 that recurs within the piece and is the starting point for chromatic melodic expansion of ideas mostly in the central range of the piano. A section in 6/8 occurs before the reintroduction of the initial material in 4/4.

The Summer Before Last for cello and piano has a melodic and virtuosic cello line which develops up to a concluding 'Bach-like' cadenza utilising the full range of the cello in rapid arpeggios and then a short reflective moment with the piano quickly concludes the work.

Fluctuations for solo violin is a solo work that moves between reflective and virtuosic sections, all woven together to give a sense of an unfolding structure, ever changing but somehow with an overwhelming sense of connectedness.

The *Three songs* for soprano and piano accompaniment use a collection of haiku poetry that explore the meaning behind the words in a melodic and direct way. The piano chords and textures compliment the emotional context of the vocal line and are chromatic and texturally diverse.

Passacaglia for cello and piano in contrast to *The Summer Before Last* which has a very expanded cello line, is basically made from a single 12-tone ground bass that is consistent throughout the work. The rhythm, speed and pacing of this ground bass may change, but the piano has all the developmental material and explores a variety of multi-textural ideas based to some extent on the cello material.

Synergism for two violins (World Premiere) begins with the second violin chromatic melodic line and as is often the case in Joseph's music presents the basic material for much of the work. This gradually expands in counterpoint and textures that use pizzicato, tremolo, double stopping and many techniques that show Joseph's ability to explore the fundamental material from many different angles that still connect effectively together and take the work on a fascinating journey.

Working with Joseph on his compositions was certainly a fascinating journey for both of us and I hope you enjoy this exploratory journey within the music of Joseph Sonnabend.

Dr Andrew Toovey

It is one of my great regrets that I only ever met Joseph Sonnabend “virtually”; when Andrew Toovey introduced us in the summer of 2020, lockdown was in full force and Joe’s anxiety resulted in his never leaving his flat thereafter.

What a pleasure it was, though, to work with him initially on *Fluctuations* and later, *Synergism*. We swiftly discovered a shared passion for the music of Alban Berg, whose combination of romantic warmth and steely discipline is echoed in Joe’s own music. He was genuinely curious to learn how his music could be better expressed on the page, so that musicians could more easily bring it to life - it’s important to remember that for so much of his life his music had been hidden away in desk drawers, so this was genuinely new ground for him. I was able to make a home recording of *Fluctuations* for him, so at least he got to hear that.

Joe was initially coy about showing me his violin duet, “*Synergism*”; when at last he did, I found much beauty, partly obscured by over-long workings-out. I made some cuts and rounded off some transitions, and he was happy with my suggestions; sadly that was as far as our correspondence got before he passed away. The version recorded here includes my amendments.

Charles Mutter, March 2024

Profile on Dr. Joseph Sonnabend

Born in 1933 in Johannesburg, South Africa, to a physician mother and university professor father, pioneering AIDS researcher and clinician Joseph Alfred Sonnabend, 88, died on January 24, 2021 in London. His parents had fled fascist Italy where they had worked met, which explains how he grew up in Bulawayo, in what was then the British colony of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). He trained in infectious diseases at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh.

In the 1960s, Sonnabend worked in London under Alick Isaacs, the co-discoverer of interferon, at the National Institute of Medical Research. In the early 1970s, he moved to New York City to continue interferon research as associate professor at the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine. Sonnabend later served as Director of Continuing Medical Education at the Bureau of VD Control at the New York City Department of Health, where he advocated for a focus on gay men's health, particularly programs to reduce sexually-transmitted infections.

In 1978, he started a private clinic for treating sexually transmitted infections. When gay men in his practice began to get sick, he was among the first clinicians in the U.S. to recognize the emerging AIDS epidemic.

Sonnabend was widely respected as an unusually compassionate clinician and researcher, willing to see any patient regardless of ability to pay, never giving up on a patient and always providing hope. In return, he earned an unusually devoted appreciation and admiration from his patients.

With a background in microbiology, virology, infectious diseases, and experience working with immune-compromised transplant patients, Sonnabend was uniquely qualified to help the scientific community grasp a better understanding of this new, pernicious disease. Working independently of government agencies, which were slow to respond to the epidemic in those early days, Sonnabend conducted some of the earliest research into AIDS, often at his own expense.

To help fund research on his patients—before HIV was discovered or the disease had a name—Sonnabend reached out to a former interferon colleague, Dr. Mathilde Krim, who was also a noted philanthropist and fundraiser. This led him, Krim, activist Michael Callen and others to found the AIDS Medical Foundation, the first AIDS research group, now known as amfAR, the American Foundation for AIDS Research.

Sonnabend also pioneered community-based clinical research, helping to launch the Community Research Initiative (now ACRIA) and other organisations. In 1983 he founded and until 1986 edited the journal *AIDS Research*, the first professional peer-reviewed publication focused on the epidemic. With Michael Callen and Tom Hannan, he co-founded the PWA Health Group, the first “buyers club” for people with AIDS in the world.

From the earliest days of the epidemic, Sonnabend championed the rights of people living with AIDS. Believing that patients are their own best advocates, Sonnabend encouraged his patients to speak for themselves, not to rely on government officials, LGBT community leaders or others. When he introduced two of his patients, Michael Callen and Richard Berkowitz, it launched an historic activist collaboration. With Sonnabend groundbreaking scientific guidance and editing, Callen and Berkowitz introduced the concept of “Safer Sex” to a global audience, through their landmark booklet, “How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach.”

In 2000, he was recognized as an inaugural Award of Courage Honoree by amfAR. In 2005, he retired from his medical practice in New York and moved to London and on World AIDS Day that year, he was awarded a Red Ribbon Leadership Award from the National HIV/AIDS Partnership. In 2018, at the age of 85, he made his public debut as a composer of classical music, with a concert at London’s Fitzrovia Chapel, part of the AIDS Histories and Cultural Festival. Highly musical, he never forgot the musical evenings his mother organised in Bulawayo in his childhood, playing 78 rpm records of music by Alban Berg and Schoenberg to a captivated local audience, and in retirement he held regular live musical events in his apartment. On most days he played Bach on his grand piano, and his own music was also influenced by Liszt, Scriabin and Rachmaninov as well as Stravinsky, with whom he shared a lively taste for the great American songbooks or Irving Berlin, Gershwin, Rogers and Hart, and others.

He was pre-deceased by his sister, Yolanda Sonnabend, the renowned theatre designer and artist, with whom he had long shared a house in London, which he always thought of as home. Her extensive work for The Royal Ballet meant the house was full of music, and in retirement Joe went back over earlier compositions as well as producing new music, using the latest computer technology in which he enjoyed considerable expertise. This did not mean he neglected regular visits to St Mark's church in Maida Vale where for many years he could play the organ to his heart's content. His late music may be approached from many musicological angles, but it should also be considered as a record of his own response to the tragedy of HIV/AIDS and part of the international musical culture the pandemic has generated.

This statement is based on a Press Release drawn up by Jay Blotcherin consultation with a group of Joe's friends following his death. It has been edited and adapted for this new context by Joe's colleague and co-executor, Simon Watney.

Musicians

Emma Tring (soprano) studied Music at Bristol University and GSMD and is now a successful soloist and ensemble singer in the UK and abroad. Emma has performed operatic roles with companies including European Chamber Opera, IFagiolini and BBC Singers. She has sung operatic ensemble and chorus with Music Theatre Wales and BBC Singers under conductors including Martyn Brabbins and John Adams.

As a soloist she has premiered many works and has performed with all the BBC Orchestras, the LSO, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, English Sinfonia, Nu Civilisation Orchestra, Orchestra of Opera North, Britten Sinfonia, The Hanover Band, RPO, AAM, The Bristol Ensemble and St James Baroque, as well as Choral Societies around the UK.

Emma joined the BBC Singers in 2008 as one of their full-time sopranos and appears regularly with them as ensemble singer and soloist.

She is also a long-standing member of EXAUDI and has recently joined new vocal ensemble Vox Urbane whose aim is to promote diversity within choral music. She has performed widely with IFagiolini and has worked with Britten Sinfonia voices, The Clerks, The Scholars and The Sixteen.

Emma is also a keen recitalist and enjoys performing with her violinist husband Robin Martin.

Idlir Shyti is an Albanian cellist based in London. He has been awarded the 'Diplôme Supérieur de Concertiste' under the tutelage of Anssi Karttunen at the École Normale de Musique de Paris. Preceding, he studied with Richard Lester at the Royal College of Music London and at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia Rome with Maurizio Gambini. In his journey of learning, he has come across and played for many renowned musicians such as Yo-Yo Ma, Gary Hoffman and Johannes Goritzki. As a soloist he has performed with Sudwestdeutsche Kammerorchester Pforzheim, Southbank Sinfonia, Orkestra Filharmonike e Tiranes amongst others.

His passion for contemporary music has led him to premiere chamber music works at Cheltenham Festival, Festival of Contemporary Music for All as part of Chineke and IXION ensembles. He has worked with composers such as David Yazbek, Joseph Sonnabend, Michael Finnissy, Morgan Hayes, Xia-Leon Sloane. Whilst, London premieres include 'The Key' Opera by Francesca Le Lohe for three trio ensembles and Kenneth Hesketh's Ein Lichtspiel.

Idlir is also an enthusiastic orchestra musician and has collaborated with Philharmonia Orchestra, English National Opera, BBC NOW, BBC CO, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Welsh National Opera.

Antony Gray (piano) was born and educated in Victoria, Australia. He graduated from the Victorian College of Arts where he studied with Roy Shepherd and Stephen McIntyre, winning several awards and prizes, including the Allans Keyboard Award two years running. In 1982 he received a scholarship from the Astra foundation to continue his studies in London with Joyce Rathbone and Geoffrey Parsons. From his time at college he has been a champion of many living composers, and his work with Australian composers Malcolm Williamson and John Carmichael has been particularly productive.

He is one of ABC Classics' most prolific recording artists, having recorded fourteen discs of solo piano music for the label, as well as featuring on a recital disc for KNS Classical and a number of other recording projects. His recording of the complete piano music of Malcolm Williamson has been included in a recent survey of 1001 recordings to hear before you die. He has recently started a major project to record the complete solo piano music of Saint-Saens, including a large body of unpublished and previously unrecorded material.

Charles Mutter (violin) was born in 1970, in Sussex. He studied with Anthony Stevenson, Andrew Sherwood, Kenneth Piper (while a Junior Exhibitioner at the Royal College of Music), David Takeno (while at Jesus College, Cambridge) and Simon Fischer. As Associate Leader (co-concertmaster) of the BBC Concert Orchestra since 2007, Charles has performed and recorded solo works by Armstrong Gibbs, Beethoven, Bruch, Dvorak, Elgar, Muhly, Sibelius, Vaughan Williams and Weill. Other concerto appearances have included Vivaldi at St Martin-in-the-

Fields, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich with Scottish Sinfonia, Korngold with the Bristol Metropolitan Orchestra and double concerti by Brahms, Saint-Saëns and Delius.

In October 2016 he gave the premiere (in Bucharest) of Guy Barker's Concerto in One Act, written for him and the BBCCO. The 2018/19 season saw him give twelve performances of Lutoslawski's "Chain 2" as part of Rambert Dance Company's ballet "Life is a Dream". Prior to his appointment with the BBCCO, Charles led the Edinburgh String Quartet for four years, touring throughout the UK and making numerous recordings. While in Scotland, he became Artistic Director of the Loch Shiel Spring Festival, a post he held from 2005 to 2014. Other chamber projects included the Smith Quartet (1995-2004) and the string trio Florin. He is now also much in demand as a guest concertmaster (most recently for Brevard Music Center in North Carolina) and session musician; over the last two years his home recordings have ranged from solo works for BBC Radio 3 to film scores and even the 2021 Oscars! Charles' violin is a copy of the "Lord Wilton" Guarnerius (1742) made for him in 2007 by the brilliant young German luthier, Stephan von Baehr.

Cora-Marina Iordache (violin) Born in Germany, Cora-Marina studied at the Mozarteum University of Salzburg in the class of Prof. Igor Ozim. She then moved to London, studying at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Prof. Krzysztof Smietana, where she was awarded the prestigious Artist Diploma. In 2016 she was honoured with the cultural ambassador prize in her home town of Fürstenfeldbruck. As a chamber musician and duo partner she has toured throughout Europe, as well as Hong Kong and India, as a chamber music and duo partner, notably with her Goldcrest Piano Trio.

On the bigger stage, she has played under conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Antonio Pappano, Chloe von Soeterstede, Valery Gergiev and numerous others. An alumnus of Southbank Sinfonia, she is currently freelancing with a wide variety of orchestras, especially that of the Royal Opera House. She plays a violin by the Brothers Amati, made in 1606.

Morgan Hayes (piano) As a pianist, Hayes has worked extensively within the field of dance playing for the Wayne McGregor Company, English National Ballet, New Adventures and the Royal Opera House. His principal piano teachers were David Branson and Hilary Coates.

Recent compositions have included *Elemental* (2018) premiered by Jonathan Powell in Darmstadt and *Film Studies* (2020) premiered by Ixion Ensemble under Michael Finnissy, who was also his composition teacher. During the pandemic his *Afterthoughts on Schubert D571* received a performance in Mexico, and *Manual* (solo organ) was premiered as part of the Royal Academy of Music's 200 Pieces Project.

Essays on Hayes's work can be found in various publications including 'The Ashgate Research Companion to Modernism in Music' (publ. 2018) 'British Music after Britten' (publ.2020) and the Musical Times (publ. 2012) where Arnold Whittall noted that 'For now, what makes Hayes's music stand out is its unusually wide expressive range. Few if any of Hayes's close British contemporaries have matched this so far-even those who have tried out a wider range of forms and genres than Hayes has.'

Hayes has been professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music, London since 2012.



Emma Tring, soprano



Antony Gray, piano



Ildir Shyti, cello



Charles Mutter, violin



Cora-Marina Iordache, violin



Morgan Hayes, piano

Credits

Tracks 1-9 St Michael's Church. Highgate ,London on 23rd August & 30th October 2023

Track 10 St. Mark's Church, Marylebone, London on 26th November 2023

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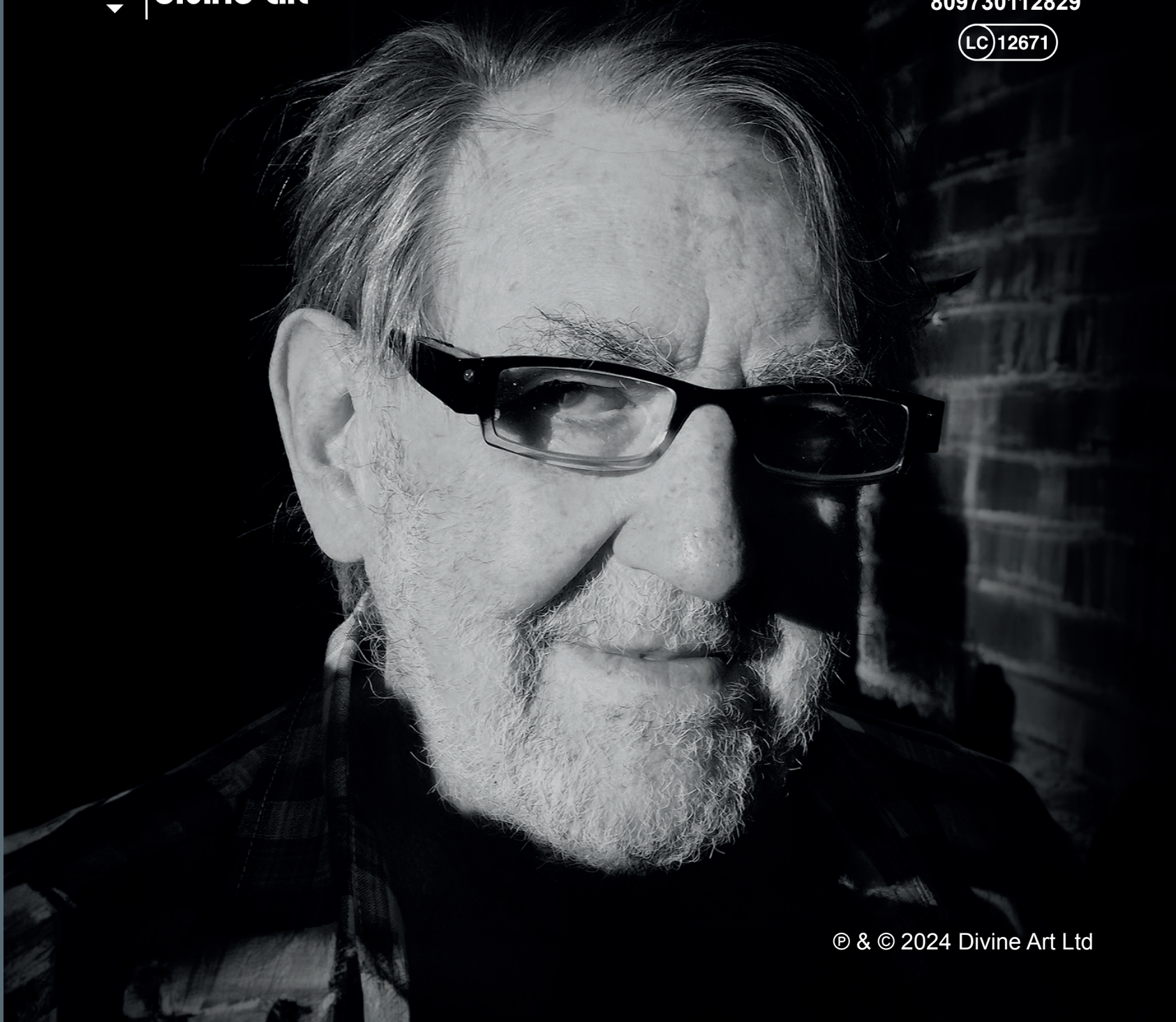
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