

# Contents

**4 Editor's Note**

**4 Competition** Win this issue's *Pianist's Choice* CD: Jean-Frédéric Neuberger's Czerny disc from Mirare

**6 Readers' Letters**

**8 News** Was Beethoven poisoned?, Firkusny's ashes go back to his homeland, Manchester's Forsyth Music turns 150 and a romantic YouTube duo. Plus, products galore

**14 Interview** The highly praised Australian pianist Piers Lane, star of Hyperion's *Virtouso Romantics* recording series, is always willing to try something new

**18 Society** A brief history of London's concert halls - their rise and fall and (in the last 10 years) rise again

**22 Q&A** Highlighting notes in a chord, playing scales evenly, avoiding practice time distractions

**23 The Scores** A pull-out section of 38 pages of sheet music for all levels - be sure to listen to our specially recorded CD before you play

**41 Keyboard Class** The return of Method! **NEW**  
This issue: a first lesson in improvising

**64 Jazz** When he was at Chetham's School of Music, finding jazz was 'a godsend' for Gwilym Simcock, now, at age 26, one of the hottest jazz pianists in the UK

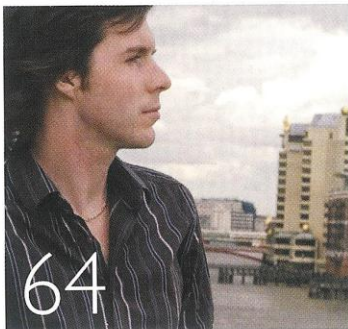
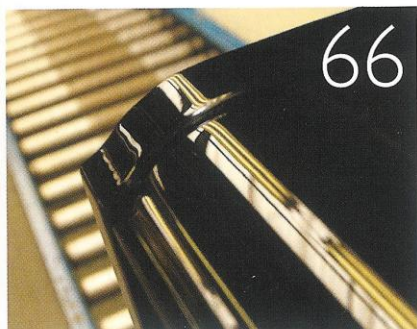
**66 Makers & Making** The stylish Radius upright is a sparkling addition to the Yamaha acoustic range

**68 Win a Piano!** Enter our competition to win a Yamaha Radius upright piano

**70 Re:view** Top picks this issue include...  
**CDs** Czerny from Jean-Frédéric Neuberger, Alkan from Marc-André Hamelin & Lucy Parham's *Beloved Clara*  
**Sheet Music** *Alla Turca Jazz* - Fazil Say's twist on Mozart, plus piano music from Africa and its diaspora

**76 Concert Guide** Highlights of piano-related concerts in the UK and around the world

**82 Readers' Classified**



**Finding Pianist in the UK**

*Pianist* is available at selected WH Smiths, Borders and other good newsagents. If you're having difficulty obtaining a copy, email our distributor at [distribution@pianistmagazine.com](mailto:distribution@pianistmagazine.com) or telephone +44 (0)1778 392417. Alternatively, cut out the coupon and hand it to your local newsagent. Wherever you are in the UK, they will be able to order *Pianist* for you!

**Dear Newsagent**

Please reserve me a copy of *Pianist* magazine until further notice

From next available issue (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SUBSCRIBE FOR JUST £27 A YEAR - CALL NOW! 01778 392483** PLEASE QUOTE PIA  
TURN TO PAGE 4 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OUTSIDE OF THE

## JAZZ

Gwilym Simcock, one of Britain's most promising young pianists, tells Nick Shave about broadening the appeal of jazz, making his debut album and how to free yourself from the notes on the page



# FUTURE PERFECT

gwilym simcock

For the jazz pianist Gwilym Simcock, it was a gratifying moment when, at last year's Klavier Festival Ruhr in Essen, the legendary keyboard player Chick Corea was presented with the festival's prestigious lifetime achievement award. As part of the award, Corea was asked to nominate a rising star – a young pianist who deserved to debut at the festival alongside the likes of Martha Argerich, András Schiff and Pierre-Laurent Aimard. Tellingly, Corea chose Simcock, proof that the young London-based pianist is not only highly rated by some of the biggest names in the jazz world, but also that he deserves a place alongside the crème de la crème of today's concert pianists.

At the age of 26, Simcock is one of the most promising pianists in the British jazz scene. Since studying jazz piano at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), he has played alongside distinguished jazzmen such as Kenny Wheeler and Dave Holland, forming his own critically acclaimed trio (with Phil Donkin on bass and Martin France on drums) and quintet (with the John Parricelli on guitar and saxophonist Stan Sulzmann). A classically-trained pianist, he has combines classical and jazz elements in his playing, clocking up awards – the Perrier, BBC Rising Star, British Jazz and Parliamentary Awards among them – and now committing his own debut recording to disc.

Yet it would be an understatement to say that Simcock is modest. In fact, he habitually teeters on the brink of self-criticism, apologising for babbling during our interview (he's actually just speaking his mind) and for seeming arrogant when mentioning the 'trillions of mental processes' that go into improvising music. Almost out of the blue, he excuses his most recent London performance, because it was not, in his view, up to scratch. 'It's hard to always produce your best,' he explains. 'I had just moved house and because things in my personal life had been bothering me, I found it hard to sit down at the piano and focus. People turn up [at a gig] and expect you to play your best, but I have to be honest enough to say that's not always going to happen.'

Contestants in the jazz category of this year's *Pianist* and Yamaha's Competition for Outstanding Amateurs might find some comfort in the knowledge that Simcock knows how difficult it can be to play your best at the drop of a hat. Indeed, as one of the distinguished panel that includes Jamie Cullum, Julian Joseph and Jason Rebello, he won't be looking for the finished article on stage, so much as someone who has the potential to move him. 'I'll be looking for someone who displays a great ability as a player of the piano, who doesn't just play the right jazz scales in the right way,' he reveals. 'I'd rather hear someone who makes the odd slip here and there than

someone who clinically plays the right notes. The key word here is communication: you should be able to communicate your personality through what you play.'

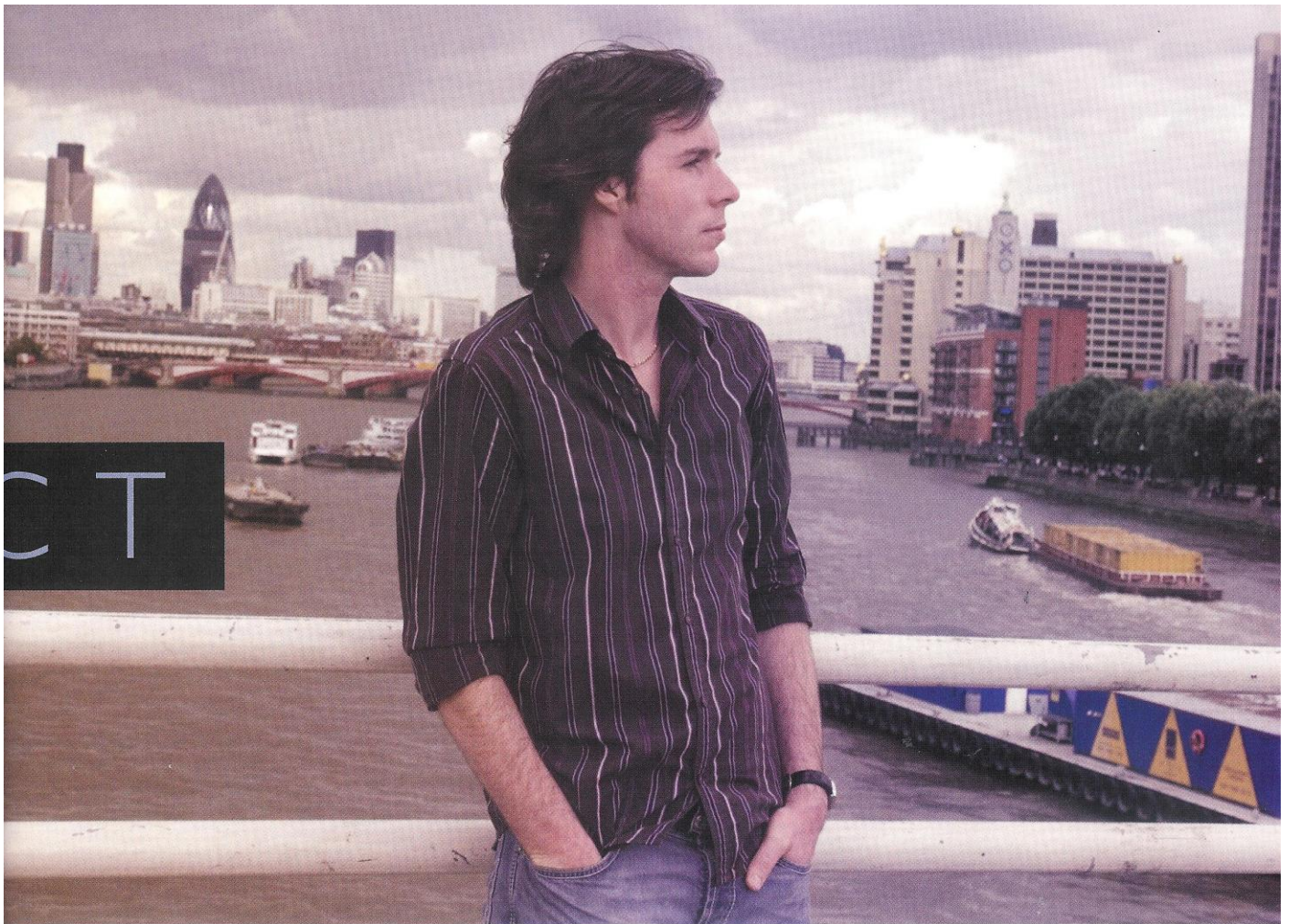
Simcock offers nothing but encouragement for anyone considering taking up jazz – at whatever age. 'One of the great things about being any kind of musician is you can learn to play at any point in your life,' he says. 'It's not like being a footballer where you have to retire because you're physically unable to play; with music you can take it in your own time.' Indeed, it's not just possible, but essential to take your time when it comes to learning the piano, says Simcock. 'You'll probably want to push on and aim to play a piece straight away, but that's not always the best thing to do. It's difficult if you're learning in your spare time, but you need to have patience, to look at things in as much depth as possible.'

### Promising pupil

Certainly Simcock has been careful to pace himself, setting down his debut disc only after exploring fully some of his own ideas on stage. The disc will feature performances from both his trio and sextet (the quintet plus John Bryant on percussion), and, he hopes, a live solo performance of the ballad, *You don't know what love is*, taken from his Ruhr recital. Listening to that performance, one can clearly hear his affinity with the ECM sound, both in its reflective spirit and, more specifically, in his use of Keith Jarrett-like grace notes, Köln-Concert-like ostinati and harmony. But together with the added rhythmic influences of Chick Corea and John Taylor, there are also emerging signs of Simcock – a willingness to explore the entire range of the piano, for example, and a taste for contrapuntal exploration that at times gives rise to walking bass-lines or sharing the melody between both hands.

Unquestionably, Simcock is still in the process of discovering his own voice and takes it as 'a massive compliment' when being compared with the jazz giants. 'It's very easy to say I don't want to sound like this and that, but in the end we are the results of the things that we enjoy and we take those bits we like and discard the bits we don't,' he says. 'Obviously if you like Corea and Jarrett there is going to be an element of Corea and Jarrett in what you play, but it's how you combine it with those pieces of Stravinsky or Michael Jackson – or whatever else you've listened to – that defines you. It's the same with people – you assume the bits from the parents and friends that you like and discard the bits you don't.'

Born in Bangor, Wales, before moving to Cheshire at the age of three, Simcock was exposed to improvised music from an early age. His mother is a school teacher and dabbling pianist, while his father was a church organist at the Victoria Road



Methodist Church in Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent. Simcock first took to the piano at the age of three, learning from his father who would improvise around the rich harmonies of Romantic Russian music. At nine, he passed his auditions to Chetham's School of Music, soon gaining the country's highest mark in his Grade 8 piano examinations – a success he repeated two years later when he took his Grade 8 exams on French horn.

Despite being one of Chetham's more promising pupils, Simcock was not convinced by 'the whole concert pianist thing', with its long practice hours spent in solitude, constant pressure to compete, and emphasis on interpretation. 'I would get into trouble [at school] for just playing the piano rather than practising during practice hours,' he recalls. But there was a lot to be gained from playing by ear, as he learned when his tutor and one-time Loose Tubes bassist, Steve Berry, gave him a compilation that included works by ECM's Pat Metheny, and Keith Jarrett's *Questa*. 'Jazz was a godsend, because I could be as individual as I liked with it, creating something new every time rather than trying to interpret things that had been played amazingly well thousands of times before.'

'It's not a massive step between classical repertoire and jazz because jazz harmony is easy to understand from a classical perspective,' explains Simcock. 'The rhythm comes from a different place – in classical music you take a much more rubato approach than when you're playing alongside a drummer. So with jazz, it's really just a question of getting away from the notes on the page.'

But how do you free yourself from the notes on the page? 'Taking your fear away from playing without a score is the most important first step,' he suggests. 'Anyone going into improvisation should take the viewpoint that there's no such thing as a wrong note. Some notes sound better than others, but as you open yourself up to improvising you can experiment,

'It's very easy to say I don't want to sound like this and that, but in the end we are the results of the things that we enjoy, and we take those bits we like and discard the bits we don't'

finding what sounds good and, after a time, weeding out what you don't like. It's also important to get down to the elementary skills – playing scales, arpeggios, assuming the correct posture and hand positions – and to get plenty of experience of playing in public.'

Simcock played around 300 gigs a year while at the RAM and he's been in demand ever since. Recently he performed with the London Sinfonietta in *About Water*, a new work by Mark-Anthony Turnage, with whom he has also won a scholarship to study composition. But as far as playing jazz is concerned, his challenge is two-fold: he wants to make jazz attractive to a wider, younger audience ('you have to have melodies'), and he hopes to establish his reputation as a jazz pianist in the concert hall. 'I don't want to play in little clubs to 30 people for the rest of my life,' he says. 'I like the concert hall approach.' ■

*Gwilym Simcock will be on the finals jury of the Pianist and Yamaba competition on 17 November at Cadogan Hall. We are giving away a free pair of tickets to the event. To win, send a postcard with your name, address and phone number to: Finals Night Draw, Pianist magazine, 6 Warrington Crescent, London, W9 1EL. The winner will be drawn randomly on 1 November.*

**Gwilym Simcock** appears throughout the UK in the autumn, at Bridgewater Hall, Manchester (12 Oct), Queen Elizabeth Hall, London (16 Nov), Lighthouse, Poole (25 Nov), Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester (28 Nov), CBSO, Birmingham (30 Nov) and Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool (2 Dec). His debut album, *Perception* (Basho Records SRCD 24-2), is released on 4 November.

For a full concert schedule and further information about Simcock and his projects, visit [www.gwilymsimcock.com](http://www.gwilymsimcock.com)