

SPECIAL FEATURE on British composer JONATHAN FeBLAND

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Full name spelling: Jonathan Socrates FeBland

Birth: 1960 (London)

Death: 2017 (London)

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Born in London in 1960, Jonathan FeBland commenced piano studies at the age of four. He was educated at the Haberdashers' Aske School where he learnt both the trumpet and clarinet, playing principal trumpet in the Senior Orchestra for five years. He first started to compose during his A-level course (16-18 years old), and some of his pieces were performed whilst he was still at school. A coveted composition place was offered to him at the Royal Academy of Music in 1978 and his composition teachers included Gordon Crosse and Paul Patterson. During this period of advanced study he received over 50 performances of different compositions both in England and Europe, and was awarded three prizes for composition by the RAM. He was also astute in that he formed a group of performers (The 'FeBland Ensemble') at the Royal Academy who were interested in expanding the contemporary repertoire for their respective instruments - these included the pianist Louis Alvanis and the cellist David Johnstone. This ensemble - in truth a coming together of soloists playing solo works rather than an ensemble as such) had certain protagonism in London life, including a Southbank recital at The Purcell Room in 1982. He had confidence in his own ability, even when he did not always get the support of the institution of the Royal Academy; Jonathan was certainly not a man of the 'establishment'. But I remember him as a student of a very high intellect (indeed he was a member of MENSA). I would like to offer you an example of his work at this time, a work structured in a tremendous arch of intensity, although it has only been recorded far more recently:

FeBland - Elegy - Solo Cello - played by David Johnstone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ERqSbJS-Dw> If anyone is interested in the sheet music, then perhaps you could leave a message in the contact of my web page with an e-mail contact.

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Since his graduation from the Royal Academy in the 1980s, he became a prolific composer which was supported by a teaching career (music theory and piano). He had works accepted by the SPM, BBC Radio 3 and local British radio stations, a dozen South Bank performances and many other

occasions in Greater London. Special mention should be made of performances by the piano soloist Louis Alvanis to whom most of FeBland's piano works are dedicated. His work has been published (and I believe is still in print) with Universal Edition, Vienna since 1986, and he is also included in a few other publishers.

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FeBland felt that he continued an essentially English tradition by dividing his works into two distinct genres, serious and light/educational music.

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His serious music sometimes extended the boundaries. Here is an example:

Johnstone plays "Anti Zones" solo cello of Jonathan FeBland

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6S9Pj3nRMA> This is a 'tour-de-force' for cello pushing all modern cello techniques to the limits - passages on all four strings, double and triple-stops, quarter-tone registers, spiccato, pizzicatos, left-hand pizzicatos, slaps with the left hand fingers, col legno, brutal glissandos, indications to follow 'snake' patterns - virtually everything that is possible for a modern cello is included! It is structured in six sections: Text I, Episode I, Text II, Episode II, Text III, and Episode III. The difficulty is increasing...a great work.

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His lighter compositions present attractively melodic material for performers who are just beginning to work on more advanced pieces whilst providing a challenge for both performers and audiences alike. I would like to mention the wonderful sets of miniatures for wind instruments and piano; virtually all the orchestral wind instruments, plus saxophone, are included in duos with piano. Many of these are published. Some were subsequently re-grouped; for example, the Popular Suite for cello and piano contains some of these wind pieces.

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Yet...few performers know of the work of this fine composer. However, those who do tend to offer him a special place in their activities. For example, a CD 'Piano Colours' was a success and featured Alvanis playing FeBland on the Meridian label. B3 Classic, a trio consisting of Clarinet, Cello & Piano feature FeBland's English Suite on a Warner Brothers CD 'Chamber Music Discoveries' that was launched at the prestigious Conde du Duque Hall in Madrid in December, 2007. This CD reached the top ten in the Spanish iTunes Classical Chart in February, 2008 and peaked at Number six in March, 2008. FeBland has also worked with Deborah de Graaff (Australian Solo Clarinetist and Professor of Clarinet at the Sydney Conservatorium). She recorded his 3 Miniatures for Clarinet and Piano (UE) on CD with Walsingham (Aus) and has received numerous International Broadcasts of

this work including airplay on ABC Classic FM, Australia. Brief mention should also be made of the eminent soloists programming the music of this composer: Leah Lock (Australian Flautist), David Chew (Brazil-based British 'Cellist), Diane Clark (British Flautist), Walter Achermann (Swiss Clarinettist), Prof. Glenn Egner (Venezuela-based American Flautist), Andrew Doyle (Australian Clarinettist), Hannah Gröschl (German Clarinettist), José Maria Santandreu (Spanish clarinettist) and Anson Wauchope (British Flautist).

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FeBland also composed in jazz and pop idioms: for example, he collaborated in Switzerland on a popular-style album with multi-talented musician Mike Turtle and pop-vocalist Jessica Knoll. On large-scale conceptions he wrote a 'Jazz Symphony' for symphony orchestra, which has not been played yet due to its difficulty. Between 2008 and his death in 2017 his compositions on various occasions entered the Top 100 chart on YouTube - that is the Daily YouTube chart for Music covering ALL genres in the UK. He worked SO fast! Once visiting me in Pamplona for a few days, in about 2009 I think it was, in two different evenings he wrote a piece for clarinet trio each day. An audio to one of these I can find as a home recording, so yet another style to impress you all, especially my friends from Argentina!:

Tango of Jonathan FeBland (B3 Classic Trio)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-GD0IP4X0c> I LOVE this piece; I even made an arrangement of this for 8 cellos (a double cello quartet, better said, also available on Johnstone-Music!).

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One of his last projects (about 2015) were the 30/31 Riddles for Solo Cello, a series of short fragments (virtually none pass the minute of duration). They remind one a little of the miniatures of Webern, although dare I say it, those of FeBland are more 'amiable'. They are finished, although the final bowings we talked about are not always edited in. The Passacaglia, the only classical/baroque style piece, was to be separated as a separate piece, leaving the other 30 'moderns' as a set. If you'd like to hear it, please do!:

FeBland - Passacaglia - Solo Cello - played by David Johnstone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9z5avqvnVM>

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And to his FINAL work: a Concertino for Solo Cello and string orchestra. Jonathan and I were interchanging correspondence on the work for over half-a-year, and Jonathan either edited in something new or refused to make a change to his original plan. A nice cadenza in the middle was my idea, accepted by FeBland, but it is discreet and rather different from something that was supposedly pushed in the Dvorak B minor Concerto by Hans

Wihan! We were almost there we he passed away; we were touching on the orchestration ideas in his last days. A final edition in 'sibelius' programme Jonathan was not able to do; he even suggested contracting someone to do it when his body and head were failing. I feel I owe it to him to make that final copy in a meticulous handwriting so this wonderful music (a sort of cross between lighter English classical style and Prokofiev) can in future be performed by enterprising cellists. Of difficulty I think one could say it's sort of slightly easier Shostakovich first concerto level! When it is ready to read comfortably, and with orchestral parts, I will offer it without any financial consideration freely on Facebook, Twitter and my web page as downloads. When you see it (I hope before Christmas 2020...) please do the memory of Jonathan a favour by making a copy on your computers and distributing it to others freely - thanks!

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The composer died in April 2017, aged 56, after a three-year battle with cancer.

Jonathan's brother said: *"I grew up seeing Jonathan dedicate his life to music. He has composed for 40 years and built a huge body of work. I know how much it would mean to him to have people listen to and perform his compositions. We've had an amazing response from classical musicians who have performed Jonathan's work – including Stephen Bryant, leader of the BBC Philharmonic – but we'd like more."*

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R.I.P. Jonathan

'documenting the cello'