

# Ben Goldscheider



**Ben Goldscheider** is a man on a mission. He is driven by his desire to find new music for the French horn and to perform it to the highest level. Ben is one of our joint-lead artists for the 2023 British Horn Festival, and **Richard Steggall** caught up with him to find out more about the music he has commissioned.

**In our Autumn 2020 interview you said, “I’ve got at least 15 commissions planned over the next five years, so I’m really excited to be adding to the horn repertoire.” How’s that plan going?**

Very well! It’s one thing to have a plan, and rather something else to raise the money and find a place to play it all. Since the interview you mention, there have been 18 premieres, with eleven more to come in the next couple of years. Of course, it’s not all about quantity, but there’s something about the volume that allows you to make a little more noise and gain traction behind the work you do.

**You had commissioned a new work for your ECHO Rising Star concerts by Mark Simpson; how was *Nachtstück* received around Europe? That piece seems to have become a staple in your recital programmes. What is special about this piece that keeps you performing it?**

Funnily enough, it seemed to elicit the best response (out of the entire recital programme) from audiences. There’s an immediacy about the piece which I think makes it very successful on a first hearing, something that is rather rare with a lot of new music. With that being said, it’s in no way because of some semblance of simplicity that it achieves this, rather it is an extremely invigorating piece, very athletic and full of emotional content. I think it’s one of the strongest pieces in our repertoire now, and

therefore a good advocate for the introduction of more contemporary works to my programmes.

**Mark is writing you a new piece for horn and live electronics. What do you like about his horn writing that makes you want to ask him for another?**

Mark treats the horn not necessarily as a horn. In other words, the technical and physical limitations of the instrument, and of myself, are secondary to the musical ideas and material. What you get, therefore, is something which pushes the player as well as the instrument and this allows him to break new ground. I think the combination with electronics will be fascinating because he’s also exploring this technology in his own programmes for clarinet; he has a vested interest in doing the most interesting thing he possibly can!

**Another composer you are returning to is Huw Watkins, who will be writing a horn concerto for you that is due to be premiered in 2024. That promises to be very exciting. You collaborate with Huw as a pianist as well as a composer; how has that relationship developed?**

In the case of both Mark and Huw, actually, I think the relationship is stronger because I have the opportunity to play with them as instrumentalists in addition to their compositional activities.

**As well as the Huw Watkins you have new concertos by Gavin Higgins and Brian Elias planned for 2024 and 2025. These are exciting times for British horn concertos! Can you tell us about these commissions? What are the differences in commissioning a concerto rather than a recital piece?**

With concertos, the scope is always larger and so you need quite a few partners on board before the project is realistic. For Gavin Higgins, we have the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Philharmonie Zuidnederland and the London Chamber Orchestra on board. For the Watkins, we have the Britten Sinfonia, Deutscher Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Köln Philharmonie and the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Luckily, the Aldeburgh Festival was the easiest of them all as they are the sole party commissioning the Elias and that will be with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Whilst the process is quite convoluted, it means that eventually you can hope to get quite a few outings of the pieces which is a real bonus. The Higgins will be a piece that uses the *Hamburg Concerto* by Ligeti as its model – it is for solo horn plus four obbligato (modern) horns. Hopefully that will be a nice way to involve the horn sections of orchestras in the future!

**You work regularly with the pianist Richard Uttley, who wrote his piece *Aufschwung* for you. Can you tell us a little about this work and what it was like to work with a close musical associate?**

This was quite an extraordinary situation. I play regularly with Rick and all of a sudden, this piece for horn and piano appeared! I had no idea he composed. The work is challenging but also full of different characters, most of which reference styles of music which he and I love. He also knows my playing perhaps better than anyone, so he very much had me in mind whilst writing the piece. He knew my strengths, my weaknesses and also where he thought he could push me. I think some of the more dexterous passagework is not something that I am particularly good at, generally, but he wanted to have this in the piece and so I had the responsibility to challenge myself!

**Are there any works that you are particularly proud of commissioning, and wish that they were known better by audiences?**

I think Mark Simpson's piece is truly brilliant, and I'm sure it will stay in the repertoire for future generations. I'm also very excited about a new piece being written at this moment for natural horn and midi keyboard. I workshoped the piece with the composer and she's managed to create something totally unique; a whole new sound world to listen to the horn in.

**You have commissioned works for various groups of instruments (solo, chamber, concerto, electronics, etc.) Is it important for you to find pieces for different combinations?**

It is both important for the sake of variety but also so that each permutation of horn playing is enriched, not just concertos.

**How closely do you work with composers that you commission? Can you tell us about any process that you go through with them?**

## Richard Uttley on *Aufschwung*

I wrote this piece in 2022, during a series of recitals with Ben at major halls around Europe. These concerts were extremely important to both of us, and the musical experiences we had onstage left a lasting imprint on me. They also opened my mind and ears to the extraordinary tonal and expressive possibilities of the horn and piano combination, and made me want to write something that would exploit our strengths as players as well as connect to the rich musical heritage of some of the places we played.

The piece has a broad structural sweep, similar to the larger of Chopin's *Ballades* or Schumann's *Novelletten*, with contrasting but related sections that – without being explicitly programmatic – imply a strong sense of narrative. The structure could be outlined as follows: prelude – theme – waltz variations – barcarolle – toccata scherzando – recapitulation – epilogue.

The brief prelude draws on the historical notion of “preluding”, whereby a musician improvises informally before beginning the piece proper. The theme that follows is lyrical and searching, and in fact it was Ben's singing voice that I had in mind as I wrote here. He often sings rather than plays during rehearsals (to “save his lip”), and throughout the piece I tried to write in such a way that the nuanced vocal qualities of his playing would be showcased.

One of our recitals together was in the Musikverein in Vienna, and so the idea of including waltz music was irresistible to me. Once the theme has been stated, waltz gestures become the starting point for variations of increasing density. At the culminating point of these variations, the piano acts as a giant cimbalom, hammering out repeated notes that disperse into thick clouds of harmony through which the horn has to pierce. This music eventually gives way to a calm barcarolle (boat song), featuring the horn in its lowest register, evoking distant ships seen and heard across water. A rhythmically driven section (‘toccata scherzando’ – dancing, playful and virtuosic) emerges out of this, gathering momentum until it gets knocked off course and collides with material from earlier on in the piece. When the theme returns, it does so with greatly expanded texture, intensity and scope. Gradually, it rises higher and higher, and there is a feeling of incremental, hard-won ascent. In the epilogue, this sense of climb and struggle is transformed into gliding ease.

The title is borrowed from Robert Schumann (the second of his *Fantasiestücke*, Op.12), whose music Ben and I play regularly. There are various allusions in my piece to specific works by Schumann and composers whose music he loved (Chopin and Schubert in particular). In the context of Schumann's piano piece, “Aufschwung” is usually translated as “Soaring”, which seemed an apt description for much of the horn writing in my piece as well as the feeling onstage during the concerts that inspired it. “Aufschwung” can also be translated as “upswing”, or “upturn”; these meanings connect in my mind to the sense of gathering optimism at a certain point in 2021/22, as live concerts began to be possible again after the COVID lockdowns.

## BEN GOLDSCHIEDER

I leave them to it. Unless they ask for things – advice, wanting to hear how something sounds, I leave it entirely up to them. I find it very exciting to let their imagination run wild.

**How do you choose which of your commissions make it into your regular recital programmes? How do they get their second, and third, performances after the premiere?**

Generally speaking, I try and have very balanced programmes. It is my intention to introduce new works to audiences but not to alienate them with too much of one thing. So it really depends on each individual concert; some new works go well with the more standard repertoire, others fare better in slightly more specialised programmes. More often than not, you have more artistic choice with recitals and chamber music, so it's in these settings that I can try and give pieces multiple outings.

**If you had a Grade 8-level student, which of your pieces would you get them to learn? Are there any pieces that you think will become standard recital repertoire over the next few years?**

The Watkins *Lament*, the three sonnets by Panufnik, and the piece for horn and electronics by Alex Groves are all works that I feel would be beneficial to students. I certainly think the three of them, in addition to the Simpson, will be standard recital repertoire before too long. Indeed, some of the pieces have already been played in final recitals around the world!

**Is there another album in the pipeline? Do you have any plans to record these commissions?**

Yes! The new Sonata by Joe Phibbs, and Gavin Higgins' Concerto have recordings already planned. I'm spinning a few plates; let's see what sticks!

**We are looking forward to welcoming you to the 2023 BHS as one of our two lead artists. Radek Baborák will also be performing. Can you tell us a bit about your relationship and his influence on your playing?**

Radek was always my idol on the horn growing up, so it was very special to get the opportunity to study with him. I think more than being a horn teacher, he really nurtured me musically; I'm very grateful that we have quite a few opportunities to play with one another. **RS**



You can watch Ben and Richard playing *Aufschwung* in a recording made at Milton Court Concert Hall on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

[youtube.com/watch?v=ps\\_AozQYRAE](https://youtube.com/watch?v=ps_AozQYRAE)



## WOODHEAD HORNS

Expert repair, sale & manufacture of horns

Woodhead Horns offers a professional and friendly horn repair and sales service with workshops in London and Ampthill, Bedfordshire. Woodhead Horns is for every horn player, whether you're one of the country's leading musicians, or a beginner just starting out on your journey. Run by professionally trained horn players and repairers, we offer a specialised service with expert knowledge of all major makes of French horn.

With many years of experience in the horn repair industry, we are regarded as the go-to place for French horn players needing advice, repairs, or a new instrument.

A horn player's approach | Fast turnaround on repairs | New and second hand horn sales | Friendly service | Crook making  
Insurance re-laquers | Extensive problem solving experience | Custom made mouthpipes | Free quotations | Baroque horns

**Monday, Tuesday & Thursday**

The Old Sorting Office, 17A Church Street,  
Ampthill, MK45 2PL

**Wednesday & Friday**

236 Webheath Workshops, Netherwood Street,  
Kilburn, NW6 2JX

tel. **+44 (0) 7970 971520**

email. **info@woodheadhorns.co.uk**

**www.woodheadhorns.co.uk**



Photo © Chris Huming 2009