

Discours de l'Ambassadeur

**à l'occasion de la remise des insignes de commandeur de l'Ordre
des Arts et des Lettres à Monsieur George Benjamin**

Résidence de France, Mercredi 30 septembre 2015

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cher George Benjamin,

**C'est pour moi un immense honneur de vous accueillir à la
résidence de France aujourd'hui pour vous remettre les insignes
de commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.**

**Le ministre de la Culture a souhaité en effet vous
promouvoir au rang de commandeur en considération du
rayonnement que vous avez donné à la musique contemporaine
dans le monde et à son accessibilité.**

**But, before presenting you with the insignia, I should like to
retrace your remarkable career.**

You started playing the piano at the age of seven, and nine years later you entered the Paris Conservatoire to study with the composer Olivier Messiaen, and his muse, wife and performer of his music, the pianist Yvonne Loriod. You were considered a child prodigy, and the maestro said that you were his best student.

You continued your studies with Alexander Goehr at King's College, Cambridge, and your unique talent was very soon recognized in the professional music world. Your first work for orchestra, *Ringed By The Flat Horizon*, was performed at the BBC Proms when you were a mere twenty years old. You had already signed a contract with Faber Music, the publisher which has supported you ever since.

In two-thousand-and-two, the London Symphony Orchestra devoted an entire season to a full retrospective of your work. Other retrospectives have since been held, notably at the Lucerne Festival in two-thousand-and-eight with the French pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard.

Your first opera, *Into the Little Hill*, was premiered in Paris as part of a portrait at the two-thousand-and-six Festival d'Automne. This marked the beginning of your successful collaboration with the dramatist Martin Crimp.

You still have very significant ties to France. Quite apart from the influence Debussy, Messiaen and Boulez have exerted on you, you work regularly with students at the *Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique* and have forged close relations with the Paris Festival d'Automne.

In twenty-twelve, the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence commissioned your second opera: *Written on Skin*. Its first performance received a standing ovation, and it has been staged all over the world to unanimous acclaim. *Written on Skin* is considered a masterpiece and has confirmed you as one of the greatest composers of today.

Moreover, we had the pleasure of broadcasting Katie Mitchell's production of this magnificent opera live at the *Institut français* during the Cultural Olympiad.

You're now working on your third opera!

You've invented your own musical language, blending panpipes and digital technology to capture new musical intervals which challenge the performer's technique.

You've composed piano solos, chamber music and orchestral works.

Between twenty-eleven and twenty-thirteen, more than forty of your works were played in the most renowned festivals in France, by the most famous musicians.

You're also a conductor and have led some of the world's most prestigious ensembles, including the London Sinfonietta, the Ensemble Moderne, the Ensemble Intercontemporain and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

You fight to ensure that serious contemporary music has a public place and is as accessible as possible. Your piece *Jubilation*, written for orchestra and steel drums, is an illustration of this. Your work makes contemporary music more accessible than ever before.

Finally, and very importantly, you agreed to become involved in Diaphonique – our Franco-British contemporary music fund – as an honorary member, and we are eternally grateful to you for it.

Pour toutes ces raisons, la République française souhaite vous renouveler aujourd'hui sa reconnaissance pour le rôle éminent que vous jouez en faisant constituer le grand répertoire de la musique contemporaine et pour votre engagement en faveur de l'amitié franco-britannique.

George Benjamin, au nom du président de la République et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres./.