

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 14 November, 2023

**NEW ALBUM FROM COMPOSER JACQUES COHEN:
THE LADY OF SATIS HOUSE; WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS; FROM BEHIND THE GLASS
Meridian Records**

MARIE VASSILIOU (soprano), **THE TIPPETT QUARTET**
ALBUM RELEASE DATE: 23 FEBRUARY, 2024 – *World premiere recordings*

Jacques Cohen's haunting operatic monodrama *The Lady of Satis House*, inspired by the story of Miss Havisham from Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, will be released on the Meridian Records label on **23 February 2024**, with lyric soprano **Marie Vassiliou** as Miss Havisham and the **Tippett Quartet**. The work was written for 'Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival' in 2012, the bicentenary of Dickens' birth, when it was cited by Mark Pappenheim in the Independent as 'opera pick of the week'.

The album also includes two pieces for string quartet: *When the Bough Breaks* (a set of three eerie lullabies) and the tone poem *From Behind Glass*, a fantasy about a quartet of Stradivarius instruments trapped in glass cabinets.

The Lady of Satis House is scored for soprano and string quartet, and tells the story of *Great Expectations* from Miss Havisham's point of view. Jacques Cohen adapted the text from Dickens himself and already had Marie Vassiliou in mind for the role, a notable interpreter of contemporary music. Like Britten's *Turn of the Screw* the nine scenes are constructed in variation form, building in intensity towards the tragic climax.

Jacques Cohen said: "Miss Havisham presented herself to me as the ideal subject - has there ever been a literary character who seems more destined to sing? This woman who, abandoned on her wedding day, resolved to lock herself away retaining all her wedding paraphernalia while she plans her revenge on the male sex seems so absurdly melodramatic, yet at the same time she is like so many of us in that she is her own worst enemy and subsequently the ultimate author of her own tragedy." The piece is essentially tragic, yet like so much of Dickens, it is also peppered with humour.

The choice of string quartet accompaniment was made for a number of reasons. Although there are surprisingly few pieces for voice and string quartet, the quartet provides a wonderful support for the voice and can be tremendously expressive. It is flexible and because of its associations can subtly evoke the 19th century and other music of the past whilst at the same time playing music that is unmistakably 21st century. The quartet of musicians are also enlisted to play occasional percussion, hum and, right at the end, chant.

Jacques found a simple solution to convey the other characters in the story: In contrast to Miss Havisham who nearly always sings, they all speak (albeit in a clearly prescribed manner) and are characterised in various ways: the icy Estella for example is clearly represented by high harmonics and a theme suggestive of childish taunting. The score is also peppered with references (some more subtle than others) to other composers including Purcell, Mendelssohn and Handel as well as some folk tunes.

Scenes/Variations:

Introduction

Scene/Variation 1 Miss Havisham bemoans her fate and resolves to take revenge

Scene/Variation 2 Young Pip comes to play with Estella and is mocked by her for being common

Scene/Variation 3 Miss Havisham is visited by her avaricious relations, the Pockets

Scene/Variation 4 Pip is apprenticed to the Blacksmith

Scene/Variation 5 Pip comes to Satis House hoping to see Estella but she is away on the continent

Scene/Variation 6 Pip is to be a gentleman and believes Miss Havisham to be his secret patron

Scene/Variation 7 Miss Havisham instructs Pip on how to love Estella

Scene/Variation 8 Miss Havisham fears that Estella now behaves coldly even toward her

Interlude/Theme

Scene/Variation 9 and Finale Pip discovers who his benefactor is. Miss Havisham expresses regret

From Behind Glass, originally commissioned by the Piatti quartet and toured by them was inspired by a visit to the *Palacio Real* (Royal Palace) in Madrid in 2013. Among the treasures on display is a quartet of Stradivarius instruments. Jacques writes that "it was rather sad to see these magnificent instruments locked away in glass cabinets instead of being played – reminiscent of seeing beautiful birds trapped in cages, helplessly fluttering, unable to fly and too dispirited to sing... So the piece describes an imaginary scenario in which the 4 instruments come to life but, finding themselves trapped in separate glass cages, they initially struggle to play together or even in the same key.... The instruments' frustration at their plight increases until eventually, with a dramatic flourish of pizzicatos, the glass shatters, they break out and are at last able to play a tune in its true form together as a quartet. Moreover, they are at last able to sing and soar like the birds they wish to emulate. It probably therefore comes as no surprise that the theme which the quartet at first attempts, and eventually succeeds, in playing turns out to be based on *The Song of the Birds*. This traditional, Catalan folk-song was made famous in a version played by the legendary cellist, Pablo Casals, in whose hands it came to symbolise the Spanish struggle for freedom during the Franco era."

Jacques wrote the darkly humorous ***When the Bough Breaks*** especially for the Tippett Quartet to play on this album. It is a set of three simple lullabies and, as its title suggests it has, according to its composer, "a playful yet sinister undertone evocative of eerie Victorian dolls' houses, as simple diatonic melodies are underpinned by non-diatonic harmonies" - something that has frequently been a feature of Jacques's music.

The album is dedicated to composer **Anthony Gilbert** (1934-2023) who was a strong supporter and fan of both Marie Vassiliou and Jacques Cohen.

‘The Lady of Satis House’, ‘When the Bough Breaks’, ‘From Behind Glass’

Meridian Records CDE 84668

Release date: February 23, 2024

Marie Vassiliou (soprano)

The Tippett Quartet: John Mills (violin), Jeremy Isaac (violin), Lydia Lowndes-Northcott (viola), Bozidar Vukotic (cello)

Recorded in St George's, Headstone, Harrow, Middlesex 11 & 25 July, 2022

Recorded by Richard Hughes

Recording Producer: Susanne Stanzeleit

[DROPTBOX LINK TO PHOTOS AND PRODUCTION IMAGES](#)

Jacques Cohen is equally known as conductor and composer. He is Music Director of the Cohen Ensemble (formerly Isis Ensemble) and has conducted concerts and broadcasts with such groups as Kremerata Baltica, National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, Sofia Soloists, BBC Concert Orchestra, Albania Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra and Bucharest Philharmonic. He has also been Music Director on several opera productions with a variety of companies, and is a passionate communicator, especially renowned for his unique ability to engage audiences in concerts.

His compositions and arrangements, include commissions for choir, orchestra, chamber works and opera. His string orchestra arrangements, particularly that of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, are fast becoming staples of the repertoire.

Frequently heard on radio in the UK and abroad, he has recorded a number of critically acclaimed CDs including the *Music for Strings* and *Transcriptions for Strings* discs (Cohen Ensemble/Meridian) and *Cohen's Carols* (Oxford Camerata/ICSM).

Jacques read music at Oxford where he conducted the university orchestras and performed his own compositions. He was awarded the Conducting Scholarship at the Royal College of Music where prizes included the August Manns Conducting Prize, Constant Lambert Award, Janet Blacklock Choral Conducting Award and Tagore Gold Medal, the college's award for its most outstanding student. He went on to work with such groups as Bombay Chamber Orchestra and London Symphony Orchestra (Assistant Conductor). In addition to numerous awards for composition, Jacques took First Prize in the NAYO British Reserve Conducting Competition and was also a Prizewinner in the Leeds Conductors' Competition.

Full biography at <https://jacquescohen.co.uk/>

Marie Vassiliou (soprano) is currently a Professor of the vocal faculties of both the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Early on in her career she specialised in contemporary and baroque music, but has since also been in demand for Romantic repertoire. Often described as a musician's singer, Marie Vassiliou is noted for her versatility. Her work is defined by a depth of musical understanding and insight. Her performing career has taken her all over Europe, as well as to North America and Asia. She has appeared at UK venues such as the Royal Albert Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Barbican, Linbury Studio, Purcell Room, St John's Smith Square, etc. and has worked with conductors such as Sir Andrew Davis, Sir David Willcocks, Martyn Brabbins, Edward Gardner, Vernon Handley, Wayne Marshall and Clark Rundell. She has also performed at major music festivals, such as BBC Proms and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. Her performances have been broadcast live by BBC Radio 3 and 4, Classic FM and Radio France.

Full biography: <https://www.ram.ac.uk/people/marie-vassiliou>

Tippett Quartet: The Tippett Quartet perform at Wigmore Hall, BBC Proms, Kings Place, Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Bridgewater Hall and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. They have toured Europe, Canada and Mexico. Their broad and diverse repertoire highlights the Tippett Quartet's unique versatility. They have an impressive catalogue of recordings, most recently being awarded Gramophone Record of the Month for their recording of Gorécki Quartets for Naxos.

Full biography: <https://tippettquartet.co.uk/>

Meridian Records: <https://www.meridian-records.co.uk/>

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