

approach the target in a curve, and weave before levelling out for the last 15 seconds to release his bombs. His bomb-aimer

on November 1944, before attending St George's School, Bristol, he spent three years as a clerk with the LMS railway. He

instructor at a bomber training unit before returning in May 1944 to No 7, which had been re-equipped

and markers; at the same time he was controlling the main bomber force by giving instructions on the

May, and they married in January 1947. She survives him with a son; another son predeceased him.

Clifford Benson

Pianist who formed a celebrated partnership with the violinist Levon Chilingirian and championed lesser-known works

CLIFFORD BENSON, the pianist who has died aged 60, was one of the most versatile exponents of the keyboard.

Greatly respected as an accompanist, soloist and teacher, and with a busy schedule of concert engagements, Benson enjoyed making music, especially with friends, and his audiences enjoyed being an integral part of those events. Regularly to be seen at London chamber music halls partnering such respected soloists as the clarinettist Dame Thea King, the flautist William Bennett and the cellist Julian Lloyd Webber, he was once described as "a pianist who thrives on dialogue".

When the cellist Jacqueline du Pré, unable to play because of multiple sclerosis, gave a series of televised masterclasses on BBC2 in July 1981, she turned to Benson as accompanist for her students.

It was probably for his long-standing partnership with the violinist Levon Chilingirian that Benson was best known. The duo won the BBC Beethoven

competition in 1969, and two years later took first prize at the Munich International Duo Competition.

When Chilingirian established his eponymous quartet, Benson was the ensemble's first choice of pianist whenever they played piano quintets, for example the Brahms at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in November 1976, and the Schubert Trout Quintet at the same venue a decade later. He was also a member, in its early days, of the Nash Ensemble, that most versatile of chamber music groups.

Although he often played with the piano lid open, Benson never forgot his role as an accompanist, using his potential to increase the instrument's volume only sparingly and earning acclaim for his "positive partnering" and "collaborative work", often with inexperienced and nervous debut artists.

On one occasion, in 1993, he agreed to step in at short notice in place of Raymond Leppard at a concert in Edinburgh, only to find that the promoter was expecting



Benson: described as 'a pianist who thrives on dialogue'

him to perform Bach on a harpsichord. He did, and the *Glasgow Herald* noted that he "nevertheless proved a successful replacement and added some delightfully shimmering tones".

Among his peers Benson was held in high regard for his broad range of repertoire; he could turn his attention from Mozart to Britten, Shostakovich and

Lutoslawski without difficulty. He also gave important premieres of works by Richard Rodney Bennett (*Three Romantic Pieces*) and Malcolm Lipkin (*Sonata No 4*).

His love of specialist repertoire marked him out as a pianist prepared to tread his own path. He championed the music of Dunkin Wedd, whose output

for classical ensembles owes much to popular traditions, including jazz, folk, rock and pop.

It was perhaps not surprising, therefore, that Benson gravitated towards Hyperion Records, a label that has made a virtue out of lesser-known works. In 1984 he accompanied Martyn Hill (tenor) and Stephen Varcoe (baritone) on a recording of Thomas Hardy's poems set to music by Gerald Finzi.

Clifford George Benson was born at Grays, Essex, on November 17 1946 and studied piano at the Royal College of Music. He was awarded the Chopin Sonata Prize and the Tagore Gold Medal. A scholarship from the Martin Fund, administered by the Philharmonia Orchestra, enabled him to pursue his studies further.

After coming to public attention with his two competition successes, Benson was soon earning critical acclaim. *The Times* commending his "cool pianism" in a review of his recital with Levon Chilingirian as part of the

Schubert Plus series at the South Bank Centre in May 1969.

He was a pianist of great energy, accepting engagements around the country and in all corners of the world. He was also a sympathetic teacher, principally at the Royal Academy of Music, preferring to offer encouragement rather than criticism.

Benson was a regular adjudicator for the Royal Overseas League and coached young instrumentalists through the Young Musicians Trust. Latterly he had taken up composition, and his solo piano piece *Au Revoir Sylvie* was arranged and performed at a gala concert by the BBC Concert Orchestra.

Clifford Benson died from a brain tumour on August 10. He married, in 1973, Dilys Davies, who is administrator of the music department at Benenden School; she survives him with their two daughters, one of whom is PA to the Archbishop of Canterbury while the other works at Covent Garden.

Fuller Osborn

... the Northern Rock Building Society, which had two-thirds of the mortgage business in the north-east