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## FIRST PERFORMANCES

### London, Royal Opera House: ‘The Tempest’

By all (press) accounts, the overture to *The Tempest*, Thomas Adès’s first full-scale opera, was completed at speed – just five days before the 20 February première, at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Comparisons with Rossini naturally followed, but the question remained whether such facility would be married to the necessary substance for a setting of Shakespeare’s play. Robin Holloway’s claim (in the *Financial Times*) that the opera was ‘make or break’ for Adès may in hindsight come to appear somewhat overstated, but there is no doubt that this was an important milestone in the composer’s career.

The mildly controversial decision to write a libretto *after* Shakespeare may have irritated purists, but Meredith Oakes’s paraphrase of the play has much to commend it. Extracting from the original a traditional narrative highlighting the power of redemptive love, Oakes simplified the plot, rendering it more suitable for the opera house. The idiom has similarly been updated, with pervasive use of short rhyming couplets replacing Shakespearean iambic pentameter. This literary conceit, mirroring the artifice of Prospero’s island, does not inhibit rich poetic statements: in the end, one barely misses the bard. However, the occasional lapse into triteness inexcusably causes the couplets to draw unwelcome attention to themselves, as at the height of the reconciliation scene towards the end of Act 3:

Miranda: How good they are, how bright, how  
grand / And I am loved by Ferdinand  
Ferdinand: Oh perfection of my life / I’ve a father and  
a wife

The discrepancy between the blandness of literary expression and the vibrancy of Adès’s music at this point suggests that this was not an ironic gesture; the resulting sniggers in the audience were unfortunate, but not unwarranted.

If the local interaction of rhyming couplets and the music at times create figures of dissonance, the same is not true for the music and plot considered on the broadest scale. The first act, for example, is dominated by a motif of alternate descending semitones and fifths that is first sung by Prospero (a commanding Simon Keenlyside). By the end of the second act, with the lines ‘I have lost my daughter’, the motif mutates into

descending tones and fifths. In the third act, as nature regains its control of the island, the figure is inverted: it is this figure that governs both the prelude and the final scene for Caliban and Ariel. No less convincing is the design of Ariel’s music: the first act is stratospheric, circling around top E, pushing the coloratura soprano Cyndia Sieden to her limits (a challenge which, I might add, she carried off magnificently). Recognizing both the physical demands on the singer and Ariel’s growing empathy for the humans he torments, the general tessitura descends throughout the opera: Sieden’s lowest note tellingly and hauntingly coincides with the words ‘if I were human’.

What is truly convincing about Adès’s score is the fact that musico-dramatic structures such as these are not only intellectually satisfying, but (increasingly) emotionally too. The narrative demands of the plot and the nature of the libretto seemed, on first hearing, to inhibit the expression in the first act (with the exception of Ariel’s beautiful ‘Five fathoms deep’ and the entrance of Ferdinand), but with the second and third acts the music and dramatic pacing were wonderfully judged.

The second act, which concentrates at first on the delegation from Naples, provides Adès with the opportunity for greater characterization (and fun). In his aria for Ian Bostridge’s Caliban, he demonstrates a new-found lyricism, offering at the same time a reading of Caliban not as a savage, but as a fey dispossessed prince. But it is in the final scene, in which Miranda and Ferdinand duet with a Mahlerian intensity, that the lyricism reaches new heights. Any suspicions that the romantic sensibilities lurking under the music of the first act were but another mask for Adès to hide behind were dissipated: the music is both sincere and overwhelming.

In the final act, Adès’s music and Tom Cairns’s production finally unleashed the magic of Prospero’s island (although it is difficult to see how the dinosaur models, which were straddled on occasion by a variety of characters, added to the ambience). Emphasizing the unambiguous romanticism of Adès’s language, one finds an abundance of familiar musical and dramatic gestures, not least in the use of a passacaglia to underscore the reconciliation quintet. Although there is no question of its power, nor its constantly

enticing orchestration, this language has not been won without cost: scenes such as Antonio's brutal rebuttal of Prospero's forgiveness might have benefited from a slightly more acerbic idiom.

The outstanding performance by cast, chorus and orchestra under Adès's baton, alongside the constantly imaginative staging and lighting, highlighted the significant achievement of the score. With *The Tempest*, Adès's undisputably exquisite aural imagination, technical fluency and dramatic sensibilities are coupled with a depth of expression that can be found in few of his earlier works. Though it is not quite the unequivocal masterpiece that some had been hoping for, there are signs that his music is reaching a new maturity, and indicative of further riches to come.

Edward Venn

### **Barbican, London: Turnage's Viola Concerto 'On Opened Ground'**

Not being a string player himself, Mark-Anthony Turnage approached his first concerto for a string instrument with some trepidation. It turns out that while the writing for the viola is idiomatic enough, Turnage has something of a love/hate relationship with traditional ideas about the concerto. Divided into two movements – Turnage admitted that in the unlikely event of his writing a symphony it would have three, five or six movements, never four – the new concerto (completed in 2001 and here given its UK première) has the expected cadenza but one that appears only 36 bars in! Such challenging attitudes to an old form characterize the new piece, subtitled *On Opened Ground*. Even so the work's structure – *scherzando* opening with slower coda, slow second movement and brisk chaconne finale – bring us back to the more usual reference points for a concerto. While he acknowledges the surprising influence of Walton 'in the second movement', the influence of that composer's own viola concerto is actually more pervasive than Turnage would have us believe. Even the title, while apparently making reference to Seamus Heaney's collection *Opened Ground*, seems to point more fruitfully to the ground bass of the second movement's chaconne. One thing is certainly as described: *On Opened Ground* is, as he claims, one of Turnage's most lyrical pieces and might win him an audience for whom the earlier astragencies were too great.

Violas notoriously get lost in or dominated by the orchestral texture and Turnage has been exemplary in ensuring that this doesn't happen: not by giving up his love for large forces with huge

percussion sections, but by giving the soloist plenty of unaccompanied or lightly-accompanied material and ensuring the orchestra answers the soloist (at least in the first movement) in a way that retains the mood of the soloist's entry. The ten-minute first movement – essentially quick and spiky in feel, with a more reflective coda – evokes Walton from the off in a brisk semiquaver figure from the soloist (the gifted young Lawrence Power with the BBC Symphony under Oliver Knussen, Turnage's former teacher). This opens the work and the movement is built upon it, as well as the brief military brass and percussion flarings from the orchestra.

More successful than the orchestra's comments on a rather unmemorable viola phrase is the coda, where by keeping the viola uncharacteristically silent and waiting, Turnage is able to deploy the full orchestra in longer-breathed phrases of deeper texture. Here too Turnage fans can enjoy the trumpets and horns transforming a phrase that had seemed merely petulant on the viola into one of real anger. In the wake of this movement's climax the viola has a entry of slow melancholy marked 'warm and intense' while – in an assured move – two solo violins play a slower, more tenuous version of the original theme, reeling after the impact of the tutti.

In the second movement, 'Interrupted Song and Chaconne', Turnage keeps the viola to the fore by using a very different approach from the first. The soloist holds a long above-the-treble-clef line while woodwind and *divisi* solo strings have a simple repeating and lamenting accompaniment. After a minute or so comes the first of three 'dark interruptions' where the viola is turned from its rather shapeless 'song' by an autumnal descending figure that sweeps across the orchestra and causes the viola to move back to the richer alto clef in a mood of nostalgic rumination. Alas, this expressive interlude is all too brief, and the soloist's limited use of the material within the interruptions is an odd compositional quirk. Sometimes Turnage's conscious challenge to romantically-expressive string instrument writing (danger: too much lyricism ahead!) can feel frustrating.

The Chaconne sees the greatest interaction between soloist and orchestra in a rather skittish finale as both forces work themselves up to one of Turnage's trademark stamping dance-rhythms. The soloist, as before, reacts by choosing quiet contemplation before the first movement's main theme returns, though without altering the irresoluteness of mood. The concerto's rapt, slow conclusion, with the viola in dark-register dialogue with the double basses before an appropriately

enigmatic ending, is one of the concerto's most impressive pages. Let us hope that Turnage digs in further to open more of this deeper ground.

Robert Stein

### London, Queen Elizabeth Hall: Carter's 'Dialogues'

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It's been more than 40 years since Elliott Carter wrote a concertante work for piano and orchestra: the 1963 Piano Concerto was one of the high watermarks of the complexity and richness of his early maturity. His latest piece is *Dialogues* for piano and large ensemble, and at its dazzlingly expressive world premiere performance on 23 January, by its commissioners and dedicatees, pianist Nicolas Hodges and the London Sinfonietta, conducted by Oliver Knussen, the work was revealed as one of the most significant of Carter's recent catalogue.

Concertos have run like a golden thread through Carter's output since the early 1960s. It's no surprise that a composer for whom opposition and dialectic have been key compositional principles should be attracted to the opportunities for contrast and 'dialogue' that the concerto form creates. However, for Carter that 'form' has never been a fixed structural outline; instead, the concerto is a state of musical being that each new concertante work creates anew: from the febrile intensity of the 1961 Double Concerto, to the intimacy and lyricism of the 1990 Violin Concerto, or the playful wit of the 2000 *Asko* Concerto.

On one hand, *Dialogues* seems markedly simpler than the Piano Concerto, inhabiting the same lucidly coherent idiom as so much of Carter's recent output. But a comparison demonstrates how that apparently pared-down language is, in some senses, capable of greater suppleness and novelty than the density of the works of the 60s and 70s. *Dialogues* begins with a solo for cor anglais, an instrument whose role Carter has described as a 'rather sad, melancholy little character', and its haltingly lyrical line is abruptly interrupted by the piano's explosive, blustering entry. The whole ensemble then crashes in with a third contribution to the argument, a series of jagged, acerbic chords, setting the scene for the whirling drama of the whole 13-minute, single-movement piece: a continuous collision and superimposition of different materials, in which ensemble and soloist rarely come together.

The Piano Concerto was no less rooted in an opposition between soloist and its associated seven-piece concertino) and orchestra, but where,

in that piece, the large-scale structure was defined by the development or deterioration of that relationship, in *Dialogues*, the relationships are always in flux, the protagonists never agreeing, even to disagree with one another. If there is no single gesture in *Dialogues* that has the same cataclysmic power as the gradual build-up of 'poisonous gas-clouds' of chords, as David Schiff has described them, that suffocate the soloist in the second movement of the Piano Concerto, there is instead a greater sense of formal openness in the new piece. Fragments of the cor anglais's line recur throughout the work, and there is a longer transformation of its opening melody shortly before the end, but instead of signalling a recapitulation, this apparent structural marker only initiates another stage of proliferation.

Even in the midst of the kaleidoscopic drama of the work, individual passages emerged with special brilliance in Hodges's performance with the Sinfonietta: the *leggero* triplets in the orchestral parts against the piano's declamatory semiquavers, about half-way through; the piano's *scorrevole* music that interrupted the transformed version of the cor anglais's line; and the sequence of quiescent piano chords before the headlong passage that concluded the piece. There was a sense of clarity and purpose that surged through the whole performance, and the whole work. Hodges had the final word in this irresolvable musical discourse with a piano line that disappeared to the bottom of the instrument's register, but the energy and seriousness of the discussion seemed still to be playing in the imagination, and will, no doubt, generate new possibilities for Carter in the next instalments of his compositional odyssey.

Tom Service

### Boston: Elliott Carter's 'Micomicón'

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Next season James Levine ceases to be Music Director Designate of the Boston Symphony, and becomes the orchestra's Music Director and Conductor. Due to previous commitments, Levine has conducted only one program in each of the three seasons since he was named to the post. Celebration of his ascendancy to the directorship of the orchestra has already begun, though, with the commissioning of works from a number of composers, including Milton Babbitt, John Harbison, and Yehudi Wyner, for his first season, restoring one of the proudest traditions of the BSO – that of the music director's active and

enthusiastic promotion of contemporary orchestral compositions. It is not insignificant that this first season of the directorship of this American orchestra by an American conductor features American composers at a time when classical concert music seems to be about the only area of American life resistant to overt jingoism. Levine's earliest plans for the season included performing Elliott Carter's *Symphonia: Sum fluxae pretium spei*, and, hoping to link the occasion and the BSO to the triptych, he commissioned from Carter a short introductory fantasy to that work, entitled *Micomición*. This pendant received its première, preceding a performance of *Partita*, the first part of the *Symphonia* triptych, at Symphony Hall in January.

Carter discovered the title when looking in a thesaurus for a synonym for 'fantasy'. Its origin is Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, where it is the invented name of an imaginary fabulous kingdom. This three-minute-long piece, however, is not intended to portray any particular aspect of the action of *Don Quixote*, but rather to indicate that it is preparation for a fantastic adventure, namely the *Symphonia*. Although *Micomición* is in four sections, one is more aware throughout the work of the interaction of two kinds of music, the first lively, slightly grotesque, crooked, and fanfare-

like, played predominantly played by brass instruments (possibly evoking ever so slightly the source of the piece's title), with a second, broader and sometimes chorale-like element. The performance of both the new work and *Partita* was dashing, vivid, and masterly, providing ample justification for anticipation of the performance of the whole *Symphonia*, which will be a major event in Levine's first full season in Boston.

Rodney Lister

### **Birmingham: John Foulds at Symphony Hall**

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's conductor, Sakari Oramo, took up the cause of the long-neglected and little-regarded British composer John Foulds (1880–1939) in the late 1990s, as soon as he was appointed to his present post. This February saw his most high-profile push on Foulds's behalf so far, with performances of three Foulds works – one of them a UK and concert première, another a world première – in three Symphony Hall concerts, two of them broadcast on BBC Radio 3. This was followed by a CD recording for Warner Classics of these three pieces plus a fourth, Foulds's early elegy for violin

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and orchestra, *Apotheosis*. Intervening in one of the pre-concert talks, Oramo stated his conviction that after decades of misunderstanding during his lifetime, and half a century of neglect thereafter, 'we owe it to this remarkable composer to play his music – and play it often'. It is difficult to think that any London orchestra would dare to programme anything so distant from their narrow core repertoire and so utterly contrary to contemporary fashions. Yet three near-capacity audiences were plainly both surprised and enthralled by the music, and many members of the public expressed a desire to hear more.

Foulds was born in Manchester in 1880 and died in Calcutta in 1939: dates and places that somehow sum up his personal odyssey – from his time as a cellist in the Hallé Orchestra under Hans Richter, very much brought up in the European mainstream traditions, to his exploration of other worlds of music. His interest in non-European, oriental scales and modes (well in advance of Messiaen, for instance) as a way of enlarging the Western tonal language, was concurrent with his study of Indian philosophical and mystical traditions. In his final years in India he collaborated with Indian musicians, even writing for their instruments.

It was this Indian connexion that allowed the CBSO to programme Foulds, as well as Holst, as part of their 'Classic Asia' season, and on 10 and 12 February the *Three Mantras* for orchestra (1919–30), the freestanding symphonic triptych that Foulds created by salvaging the preludes to the three acts of his otherwise discarded and destroyed Sanskrit opera *Avatara*, showed his fusion of Western modernism and Indian techniques at its most potent. Unplayed in Foulds's lifetime, this is one of his most instrumentally virtuosic and challenging works, but since its first performance (for a Lyrita CD) in the late 1980s it has become one of his more frequently-heard scores: these were the third and fourth occasions on which Oramo and the CBSO have presented it in concert. The coruscating high-speed polytonal activity of the first *Mantra* (which Oramo takes at a tremendous lick, but confesses he still hasn't managed to get up to Foulds's metronome-mark); the rapt pan-diatonic mysticism of the second, with its 'Neptune'-like female chorus; and the baleful, rhythmically complex, harmonically extremely strict (and extremely dissonant) *raga*-invention of the third, display a composer as confident in his command of a whole range of techniques and of a large orchestra as any of his European contemporaries; a composer who pulls no punches and fluffs no opportunities on his way to the final orgiastic explosion of accumulated power.

Something of the same grandiloquence and ambition, at least, informs the very much earlier and more obviously derivative *Mirage* (1910), a symphonic poem in six large sections. Foulds was allowed a play-through of this piece by the Hallé shortly after he wrote it, but no public performance followed and it remained unheard for the rest of his life. The CBSO performance on 25 February would have been the world première had the work not received a studio recording in Luxembourg in 1981 as part of a boxed set of British Music of its period.<sup>1</sup> As it was, this CBSO performance was the first time *Mirage* had been heard in concert anywhere. While one need not look far in this inventive and big-hearted piece for the imprints of Wagner, Richard Strauss, César Franck, Elgar and perhaps Bruckner and Sibelius, there are elements that are more forward-looking (the effective use of quarter-tones in the string writing of the third section, for example: Foulds was the first British composer to systematize and use quarter-tone divisions of the octave) and ideas that are already so characteristically Fouldsian that he quarried them from the score for use in much later pieces.

The merest wisp of a programme suggests that the term 'Mirage' should be understood in the spiritual sense, as the illusions after which all men strive, and the fourth section (itself subtitled 'Mirage'), a fleet, cold scherzo episode that dissolves away all the motifs so far heard, is a remarkable invention. To this is counterpoised, at the beginning and end of the work, a majestic chorale-like wind theme which Foulds labelled 'Immutable Nature'. Its glowing apotheosis at the work's conclusion is the nearest the score comes to visionary utterance. Indeed despite its occasional *longueurs* and reminiscences of other composers, in its lofty philosophical aims, episodic construction and monumental effects *Mirage* is probably the nearest equivalent in the British repertoire to Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Sakari Oramo demonstrated his faith in it by putting the Strauss in the same programme, confident that Foulds would not be diminished by the direct comparison – and, in many passages if not throughout, neither he was.

But the highlight of the 25 February concert was a very different Foulds work, one of the most unusual in his highly varied catalogue. *Lyra Celtica*, a concerto for wordless medium voice and orchestra, received its world première – or at least the first two of its movements did. There are

<sup>1</sup> By the Luxembourg Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leopold Hager. Originally issued on LP by Forlane records, it was reissued on CD about ten years later (Forlane UCD 16724/25), coupled with works by Hubert Parry and Havergal Brian, but is currently unavailable.

several scores in Foulds's output which, though planned in three movements, only consist of two movements and a fragment of the third. *Lyra Celtica* falls into this category. In fact some 150 bars of the finale exist in full score, but beyond that only a few fragmentary sketches survive.

Unfinished, unpublished and unplayed before 25 February, there seems to be only circumstantial evidence as to when the work was actually composed. It seems likely that the conception originated around 1917 but that most of the writing was done in the early and mid-1920s. Foulds's son Patrick, now in his late eighties, attended the performance and testified that he remembered his mother singing the work to his father's piano accompaniment at their home in Abbey Road, London, in the 1920s. In fact Foulds's second wife, the Irish-born Maud MacCarthy (1882–1967) – a singer as well as a virtuoso violinist and one of the leading Western authorities on Indian music in the early part of the 20th-century – was clearly the soloist for which *Lyra Celtica* was intended. One of her more unusual talents was the ability to sing the *srutis*, the 22 microtones of classical Indian music, and the solo part of *Lyra Celtica* includes several sweeping, resonant scale-like patterns in this tuning system, notably in the dramatic opening cadenza for voice and timpani.

Whether Foulds consciously meant to suggest by this the mysterious but genuine affinities between Gaelic *ceol mor* (the 'great music' of the Highland bagpipe) and Asian music must remain moot. In his time he wrote many conventionalized Scottish/Irish light-music *morceaux* and sentimentals, the best-known being the once-popular *Keltic Lament*. But *Lyra Celtica* is free from any hint of such kitsch. Its principal melodies are written in the style of various kinds of songs from the Western Isles, and show that Foulds knew much more about this kind of music than is apparent from his 'Keltic' salon pieces. But it is also an extraordinary blend of different tonal systems: diatonic, pentatonic, whole-tone, microtonal and quarter-tonal writing are all heard at different points – some of them simultaneously. This creates an evocative and frequently iridescent sound-fabric while, throughout, the delicacy and effectiveness of the scoring (for a medium-sized orchestra without low brass but with important roles for harp and celesta) was frequently breathtaking. The opening of the second movement, the voice's long, chant-like melody borne on a shifting carpet of low, hollow, sea-like sounds from four double-basses, lingers in the memory.

The first movement, after the attention-grabbing cadenza for the soloist (Susan Bickley, here, in

courageous form, sweet-voiced and with the virtually flawless intonation the part demands), develops as a bubbling energetic free sonata-design with bravura passage-work in the first subject and a more soulful, ravishing melody for second subject. The second movement alternates a slow but serene chant-like melody using the lower part of the mezzo-contralto range (there is some evidence this wordless tune may originally have been intended as a song to words from Ossian) with a quicker, lighter dance-song as well as a second, central cadenza. The movement's final dying-away, the voice descending in microtones while the strings slowly descend also in quarter-tones, with whole-tone and semitonal descents in other parts of the orchestra, the music so to speak dissolving and fading beyond the limits of hearing, is a remarkable and, surprisingly, a spell-bindingly effective stroke. Nevertheless it feels open-ended, leaving the listener, as it was doubtless intended to, in a state of anticipation to see what happens next. (The finale fragment – which opens with the first tutti in the entire work where the voice can have some respite from her virtually continuous activity – is substantial enough, and adds enough of another dimension to the work, to be worth playing, if some kind of ending could be fashioned for it.)

In the hall there were occasional balance problems where the voice tended to be obscured by the orchestra, but these could probably be remedied by further rehearsal, and no such problems arose in the subsequent BBC broadcast. As it was, the orchestra seemed already to be playing the piece with the kind of skill and enjoyment that they now patently bring to Foulds's *Mantras*, which has become a warhorse for them. One felt one was in at the birth of a unique and magical phenomenon of 20th-century British music. What is *Lyra Celtica* like? Bax? Bridge? *Luonnatar* or Loreena McKennitt? *La Mer* or Ravel's *Schéhérazade*? There are fleeting affinities to all of those, maybe, but mostly it's nothing quite like you ever heard. Yet the 'Celtic' (I suppose Irish-Hebridean) melodic matter is like a distillation of things one has indeed heard and responded to all one's life. Above all, this is a gravely joyous work, quite dizzyingly beautiful, at a level where discussions of idiom, influence and up-to-dateness appear woefully beside the point. That is something that Foulds repeatedly achieves in his best works, and this is another such *sui generis* achievement. The courage of Oramo and the CBSO's advocacy of it is most warmly to be celebrated.

## Los Angeles: the Walt Disney Concert Hall and New Music

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What better event to proclaim the potential of Los Angeles's new Walt Disney Concert Hall than a bicentennial celebration of the birth of Berlioz with Simon McBurney's Theatre de Complicité of London and Esa-Pekka Salonen's Los Angeles Philharmonic?

Let me put my prejudice up front: I'm not into sound-and-light shows or making classical music something it's not. But as the narrator took us back in time to 1803, a huge transparent veil dropped in front of the orchestra, the hall's pastel hues subtly metamorphosed, a lone piano and three male singers seemed to appear apparition-wise on a raised platform behind the orchestra, and we were told that Berlioz originally intended his *Symphonie Fantastique* to be preceded by his *Lélio*, which we were about to experience in its original version.

As the sounds of solo instruments began to emerge from within the orchestra, and the pianist with singers created their own solo world, softness embraced me – not softness as opposed to loudness but the softness of touch, of velvet and clarity and presence, as found in an intimate room. Such intimacy was a startling contrast to being hit, minutes before, by the sun-reflecting sails of Disney's dazzling, highly reflective stainless steel exterior.

The interior continues the sailing motif. Sitting in the gallery on the side with full view of the belly of the hall, I was immediately struck by the main floor's shape, like a Portuguese galleon with seats swooping down and then slightly upward to the spacious stage, itself not centered but still embraced on all sides by audience, with a steep ten rows of seats behind the orchestra seeming to complete the amputated-tail shape of those old ships. Despite the hall's 2,265 seats, the immediate visual impression was as intimate as the sound.

The lights changed colors, successive slides appeared on the veil; and then I wondered 'how can those eyes move on that face if it's a slide' (shown, by the way, not only on the big veil but on a smaller screen high in the upper rear, plus on the walls above each side gallery, and thus visible from every angle without having to crank your neck). A handful of musicians stood one by one and then lost their instruments (violins, a flute, a trumpet, an entire cello) as they were slowly raised high above the orchestra: Normally all this would strike me as hokey manipulation, and I would be conscious of technique rather than the experience of the music. But not in this atmospheric place.

I gradually realized that this is indeed a hall for the 21st-century, just like the new concert hall at

Singapore's Esplanade on the Bay, where a few months earlier I had experienced the staging of a light-and-percussion show when Evelyn Glennie and her technician, James Wilson, staged (I choose the verb deliberately) the world première of Steven Stucky's *Spirit Voices* (reviewed in *Tempo* vol.58 no.228). Given the flexibility of staging, lighting, movement, and even screening that these state-of-the-art halls afford, and given artists of such exquisitely imaginative and subtle tastes, it was possible to retreat in time, to join Berlioz in his own day, and then, through the sparing use of continued lighting and projected images, be transported forward again via the still-unique, *sui generis*, and ultimately violent, fantastic symphonic sounds of Berlioz into our own time. As the narrator said at one point, 'What is this mysterious force that enables us to substitute imagination for reality!'

Lest this all sound like hype, let me confirm that the acoustics of the hall (which is the element that matters to me most) kept the music dead center in my consciousness. Though, with my eyes closed, I could pinpoint the exact location of each soloist, there was a surround-sound warmth that embraced me. Even the elevated piano behind the orchestra projected itself with a true, even, warm richness from treble to bass. At one point in the third movement, as a solo clarinet played with the entire *piano* string section, I leaned over to composer William Kraft and said, 'That is the most remarkable balance and sound I think I've ever heard in a concert hall!'

True, in more ferocious *tutti* the strings were buried by the woodwinds and brass. The same was also true when I sat on the main floor two weeks later, though it was impossible to tell whether it was because of the quality of the Philharmonic's strings themselves, the present set-up of the musicians, or both. When I sat behind the orchestra for a concert, the only balance problem was the French horns with their bells pointed right at the stalls. Also, the chorus, which seamlessly entered and exited upstage in *Lélio*, sounded clear but distant when soft, but warm, balanced, and richly present when *forte*. In a hall this superb, consider such criticisms nit-picking.

The one area where I do fault architect Frank Gehry is in his dismal feel for recreational spaces. The enormous dimly lit lobby has the angles, colors, and flat dullness of an utterly prosaic office building. The low-ceilinged cafeteria area is oppressive, and its charcoal-colored men's room has exactly one urinal. One guy in line said, 'Kinda gloomy in here'. Also, if you exit the auditorium on the violin side, you're told the men's rooms are on the far side of the hall. In the hall itself, seats are

small, a bit too upright, and pity anyone with long legs.

Both Kraft and composer Donald Crockett of the University of Southern California feel that the new hall has a significant impact on the area's new music scene. Heidi Lesemann, Director of the American Composers Forum Los Angeles, says, 'In the Green Umbrella series, Philharmonic players learn five whole concerts full of new music as a matter of course. They used to be performed at outside venues; now they're performed in the orchestra's home hall, which itself is emotionally intimate and tactile. Composers love to write for the space itself. Now the LAPO is putting its stamp of approval on new music with time, money, and space. Even the area's top music critics are into new music'.

Crockett added, 'At Green Umbrella, attendance has tripled with the new hall. Driven by Salonen, [New Music Consultant] Stucky, and the LAPO's upper management all genuinely excited by new music, *as a team* they feel it's the way to go to keep the orchestra alive. And there's a buzz about it that extends out to other performers as well'.

In addition, underneath the Disney Concert Hall is the Roy and Edna Disney CalArts Theatre (RED-CAT), the new performance home for CalArts, a small liberal arts college that pushes music, dance, theatre, film/video, and visual arts in experimental directions. According to the Dean (and composer), David Rosenboom, 'There's lots of multi-disciplinary space and technology, flexible seating for about 285 people, and fabulous variable acoustics with movable reflectors for the right dispersal of sound, plus multiple sound systems for films, etc.' He agrees with composer John Williams: 'Students either get past identifying themselves into traditional categories, or they get out of CalArts. They learn to improvise and interface with technology. There's lots of ethic, jazz, and world music as well—the borders break down here'.

Composer Dorrance Stalvey, Director of the famed Monday Evening Concerts held near Beverly Hills, adds, 'While the focus of CalArts changes according to its faculty, Monday Evening Concerts remain a good solid footing in traditional 20th-century works but also keeps in touch with the cutting edge of mixed media, electronics, and technical advances'.

None of the composers I talked to felt that the area's gigantic film and television music industry had much impact on the new music scene, and most were amazingly ambiguous about the impact of the area's enormous immigrant population on it as well, though Lesemann observed, 'With 96 languages being spoken in L.A. area

schools, all these cultures have broken things up and change the perception of concert hall music and what's allowable'.

Dean Corey, who's been in music management from 25 years and is executive director of one of the area's largest presenting organizations, said, 'Music itself isn't in trouble; just the delivery systems are in question'. He's one of many who thinks that, with the unique focus the Disney Hall has given to music in L.A., it's definitely part of the solution.

Gil French

### London, Trinity College: David Johnson's 'Sorry, False Alarm'

An opera which runs for less than an hour and has 20 solo parts might seem destined to remain unperformed, but Scottish composer David Johnson's *Sorry, False Alarm* was composed as a training opera for students, and a workshop production by singers from Trinity College of Music (24 March, Greenwich) demonstrated that it fits its purpose admirably.

The 20 soloists also form a chorus which introduces the story, fairy tale style ('Once upon a time ...'), and re-enters at intervals to link the scenes and move the plot forwards. Johnson writes that the opera's 'narrative method comes from children's bedtime stories, the Grimm folk tales, Brecht's and Weill's music-theatre pieces, Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale* ... held together with a strong dash of Old Testament'. The piece satirizes a society in thrall to commercial greed and to modern technology which defeats its purpose because it doesn't work properly.

So, once upon a time there was a small burglar alarm factory in Scotland, with dedicated employees making high quality systems. But demand is small and the firm hires a management consultant who recommends producing cheaper, inferior products in much larger quantities. The company advertises its newly branded 'Euro-K' (you're ok) alarms on television with great success. Once installed, however, the alarms keep going off at random and so create an ideal environment for the thieves they are supposed to deter. Even the police station which monitors the alarm calls is robbed.

David Johnson wrote the witty libretto as well as the music; the opera held the audience's attention throughout. The musical style is tonal and sounds gratifying to sing, without necessarily being easy. Johnson does not use dissonance gratuitously. It arises naturally from the musical argument or

from the need for coloristic effects (those alarms, for example). A faint, slightly archaic blues/jazz influence makes itself felt at times and the syncopated jingle for Euro-K-Alarms came across as somewhat dated in the context of a TV commercial. It would be effective, though, as a local radio jingle, and the amusing recording-session scene need not lose its humour if set in a radio studio.

The lively, well-projected performance had been put together in just six rehearsal sessions. All credit to the students, who had obviously enjoyed working on the piece, to musical coach Paul Chilvers, and to director John Fulljames for bringing the work vividly to life with no scenery and few props.

Jeremy Barlow

### London, Royal Academy of Music: Stephen Dodgson at 80

Stephen Dodgson (born in London, 1924) is not so much a neglected composer as a quintessentially English one, with a quizzical sense of humour, who has never really courted a mass audience. He is often described as 'a performer's composer', responding to commissions from colleagues and prominent artists connected with the Royal College of Music, where he taught harmony to, among others, guitarist John Williams back in the 1950s. His connexion also with Julian Bream led to his lifelong love-affair with the guitar, despite the fact that Dodgson never played the instrument himself. His resulting two Guitar Concertos (1959 and 1972) gained instant international recognition. At Dodgson's 80th Birthday celebration concert at the Royal Academy of Music on 29 February, Head of Guitar Studies Michael Lewin said in his introduction that: 'no single composer who is a non-guitarist has contributed in such a major way to the guitar repertoire, and in such varied genres'.

After a lifetime teaching composition at RCM, Dodgson's love affair with the guitar moved into a new exciting phase when in the early 1990s it was at the Royal Academy of Music that he was finally persuaded to write for a Guitar duo, inspired by a special project centred on two first-year guitar students, Mark Eden and Christopher Stell. Their subsequent blossoming into the successful Eden/Stell Duo led them to commission an important work from Dodgson – his Concertino for 2 Guitars and Strings, *Les Dentelles*, given its London première at the Purcell Room by the pair in October 2001, and now released on their CD 'Follow the Star', including other Dodgson duo

works (BGS Records 108). I can thoroughly recommend this vibrant recording, which comes with personalized liner notes by the composer.

The same forces duly reassembled for the RAM 80th Birthday Concert, with conductor George Vass and his Orchestra joining the Eden/Stell Duo for a lively performance of the Concertino to a large audience in the Duke's Hall. The work opens with a striking solo cello theme, mournfully intoned, later joined by shimmering strings as a prelude to the guitar duo's first entry, precise and full of rhythmic impact. The intervention of the solo cello at strategic points throughout the work gives much scope for Dodgson's inventive humour, as battles ensue with the duo, and even the orchestra is brought to a high unison halt at the close of the second movement – a 'nocturnal reverie'. The rhapsodic high-register passages for strings in this movement, and plaintive first violin solo, display a much more accessible side of Dodgson than was apparent in some of his chamber music played at RAM earlier in the day. The closing Rondo of the Concertino was a sheer joy, well projected by Eden and Stell, with excellent ensemble, backed by firm rhythmic control from conductor George Vass.

Dodgson's *Riversong* (1994) also impressed: it is a good example of the composer's success with programmatic style, though it was perhaps over-long in duration for the average music-lover. Like the new CD, the RAM concert also included *Promenade* (1988) and *Pastourelle* (1993), both for Guitar Duo. The RAM concert was graced by a guest appearance by John Williams himself, who played, with immense authority, Dodgson's *Fantasy-Divisions* for Guitar (1970). As a pianist, I was very interested to be presented by Stephen Dodgson with a review copy of the two-volume CD of his six piano sonatas expertly performed by Bernard Roberts, who has collaborated with Dodgson since the 1970s (Claudio CD 2001).

I am particularly drawn to the Fourth Sonata with its quirky opening rhythmic figuration, which leads on to what is described by Wilfrid Mellers in the CD notes as 'a scattily fast Waltz'. The Fifth Piano Sonata, which I remember hearing premiered at the Wigmore Hall by Bernard Roberts in 1993, is markedly less accessible on first hearing, fiendishly difficult both technically and to the ear; but like most of Dodgson's prolific output, it repays further exploration. His use of dual tonality, often 'unresolved', and dichotomous structures, display an in-depth complexity here that seems to go beyond the more relaxed style of his ever-popular guitar works

Jill Barlow