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FIRST PERFORMANCES

London: BBC Proms 2010

(1) Schuller, Abrahamsen, Langgaard, VW-Matthews

If I am capable of producing something like Gunther Schuller's *Where the Word Ends* – given its UK première by the WDR Symphony Orchestra under Semyon Bychkov on 20 July – when I am 81, I would politely ask them to hold off with the soft pillow for just a little longer: this was an enormously impressively piece of work, both in its exploitation of the orchestra and in its confident structure, and thrilling in its overall effect. At once concerto for orchestra and single-movement symphony, *Where the Word Ends* was commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra for its 125th anniversary in 2006 but laid aside until February 2009 because it couldn't be given adequate rehearsal at the time. One sees why: its textures can be ornate, intricate, and yet it demands the utmost confidence in performance. Its 25-minute vault opens with tremolo strings which slowly stir to life; the surface soon sparkles with detail, although the underlying pace is slow. Brass and percussion enter and the whole orchestra bubbles into activity – though with a glassy quality imparted by high strings, bright percussion and active piccolos – and makes its way forward, it seems, with pieces of other musics: fragments, brief motifs, brittle shapes. Occasional shakes from the timpani and percussion suggests that all hell is about to break loose, instead of which the orchestra seems to heave itself over an edge, and the dynamic drops to allow a limpidly lovely violin line that has wandered in from more tender times.

Seven minutes in, a Brucknerian *Adagio* opens out, riding on surging strings, and crests to a climax; as it dies away, an insistent scherzo pushes forward in a rather wild-west chase until it reaches a trio which is the eye at the centre of a storm, with a solo violin rhapsodizing over jazzy observations from the brass and woodwinds. The scherzo resumes, at first half-heartedly, until the horns hound it insistently over the landscape, and as it runs out of fire the *Adagio* resumes in rapt intensity, with something of Bruckner in the striving bass lines and Szymanowski in the string arabesques. At this point, some 18 minutes into the piece, the concluding *Allegro vivace* is uncovered, pushed along with repeated chords from brass and woodwind. Each section steps up: the strings offer a recitative, the brass a declamation, the piano some jazzy riffs, and so it passes around, no one agreeing on a way forward. Insistent chords push along again, generating an excited churning across the orchestra; the brass throw in a jazzy declamation and the music sweeps to a sudden close. A belter of a score, inventive, engaging and engaged, shapely – altogether magnificent.

Wald, by the Dane Hans Abrahamsen (b. 1952), was treated to a buoyant first British performance by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group as part of their late-night Prom on 6 August. Eighteen minutes in duration, *Wald* is formally a set of variations, taking its material from *Walden*, a wind quintet he composed in 1978, and its sport from play with metre and intonation, often obscuring the demarcation between variations. The writing for horn uses natural harmonics and, as Julian Anderson's programme note explained, the

> other instruments in his ensemble play pitches outside normal tuning. The ensemble he uses is most odd and is grouped in several concentric semicircles: as well as the usual strings, it includes a bass flute, cor anglais, bass clarinet, bass trumpet, kalimba (an African tuned percussion instrument) and a piano part that requires the player to play almost as much on the strings as on the keys.

A horn call, indeed, starts the proceedings as if on some distant hunt before the piano insists on the here-and-now, and fragmentary phrases begin to scramble upwards. The hunt draws closer, full of rhythmic tension and excitement, but a passage of downward-drifting phrases calms matters down. The hunt resumes, but once again the piano interrupts, and the phrases now push upwards, over busy textures. The impression slowly forms that something is coming unstuck, that certain elements are losing their place in the onward progress of the piece: the hunt resumes in the background, but in the foreground it's now every instrument for himself. Another lazy, languorous episode precedes a sudden calm, over which a double-bass intones a slow recitative, resumed after a fermata with cello and trombone, somehow suggesting that time is standing still. High-held violin-writing imparts a luminosity to the dark textures, when there's a sudden irruption of wild chattering across the entire ensemble and a reminder of the hunt pushes onwards, out

of rhythmic kilter. The headlong rush is halted by two insistent *pizzicati* from the piano (well, it sounded as if the strings were being struck and plucked at the same time, and there ain't a word for that yet) and a solo violin sings an elegy based on a simple three-note phrase over dying sounds from the rest of the ensemble, percussion chimes suggesting that a life is being counted away, laid to elegant rest in one last, long-held chord.

Abrahamsen's dislocations seem positively stable when set against *Music of the Spheres* (*Sfærernes Musik*) by a Dane of an earlier generation, Rued Langgaard (1893–1952). Per Nørgård, who at 78 finds himself the rather youthful Grand Old Man of Danish music, tells the tale of slipping the score of *Music of the Spheres* into a pile being considered for performance at the Nordic Music Days in 1968; when Ligeti, also on the panel, looked at it, he confessed he hadn't realized he was a Langgaard epigone. The wild oscillations of Langgaard's personality took him to regions that more stable characters will never know (his handwriting, for example, could change beyond recognition from one week to another; most of us couldn't do that if we tried), and *Music of the Spheres*, written in 1916–18, when its composer was in his mid-twenties, is plainly the product of the wildest of imaginations – not because of any kind of hysterical excess but rather the opposite: a visionary soundscape, realized with the utmost control and restraint. The scoring – solo soprano, two altos, large orchestra and smaller offstage ensemble, double choir, organ – may suggest that Langgaard is filling his lungs for a bellow of Scriabinesque immodesty; instead, much of the piece whispers half-grasped secrets with quasi-religious intensity.

Music of the Spheres was given its first British performance – leading straight on from Ligeti's *Lux aeterna* (a clever bit of programming from Roger Wright) – in the Prom of 11 August, with half of musical Denmark on the stage and reinforcements in the gallery: Thomas Dausgaard conducted the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Concert Choir and Vocal Ensemble with Inger Dam-Jensen the soprano soloist. Cast in a single, 36-minute span, the music has been familiar on CD for some time now (and a new recording, from these very forces, was released on Dacapo 6.220535 to coincide with this performance). But hearing it live reinforced just how weird the piece is – mobile phones in the audience and a passing siren outside the Albert Hall almost fitted in. The virtuoso writing for four timpanists underlined its exact contemporaneity with Nielsen's Forth Symphony, and in this hall writing for multiple timpani will recall Brian's *Gothic Symphony* to ears so disposed. Much of the texture is gossamer thin, drifting along in one or two parts on upper strings and winds, sometimes underpinned by a pedal, sometimes not; a huge climax deploying timps, organ, tam-tam and birdscare dies away almost as quickly as it was conceived, to be replaced by a string chorale of surpassing beauty that soon turns bitter. The second entry of the distant orchestra brings a passage of chromatic ecstasy that sounds like a message from a distant star, casting the piece as a whole as some vast pendulum swinging through space. *Music of the Spheres* is the kind of quixotic extravagance that seems tailor-made for the Proms; its inclusion in the 2010 season was all the more welcome for the wait.

The approximate recreation of the Last Night of the Proms 1910 on 'Henry Wood Day', 5 September, saw the first performance of the Vaughan Williams/David Matthews *Dark Pastoral*, a realization by the latter of some of the sketches the former made for a cello concerto in 1942–43, apparently with Casals in mind; the soloist here was Stephen Isserlis, with the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Paul Daniels. Much of the work exists in sketch form, but Ursula Vaughan Williams, the composer's late widow, forbade a reconstruction; it seems the disjointed material for the finale would rule out a satisfactory completion in any event. This lovely work, 11 minutes long, is the compromise result: an orchestration of VW's short score for the slow movement, continued by original music by Matthews in the spirit of VW. Anyone expecting a revelation *à la* Elgar Third Symphony will have been disappointed, but the rest of us were not: *Dark Pastoral* is an unassuming lyrical disquisition that falls on the senses like a gentle walk through the English countryside. The piece opens in rhapsodical mood, in a modal G minor, the solo cello gradually establishing a modest, unassertive personality before a brief climax – the extent of the original material. Matthews continues in VW's folksong manner, bringing back the opening melody in a canon flicked between the woodwind and *pizzicati* from the soloist. Another climax restores the opening of the piece, before it sinks into a tranquil coda.

The keenest disappointment of this year's Proms was nobody's fault: Jouni Kaipainen's Sixth String Quartet was scheduled to have its world première on 26 July in the Proms Chamber Music series in the Cadogan Hall, in a performance by the Finnish group Meta4. Kaipainen's recent music has been astonishingly good – his Third Symphony, completed in 2004, is a masterpiece.[1]

[1] There's a recording, with the Bassoon Concerto (2005), by the Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra under Hannu Lintu on Ondine ODE 1089-2.

So the news that the illness of one of the players meant the absence of Meta4 and the cancellation of the premiere brought considerable frustration. Next year, I hope.

Martin Anderson

(2) Sorensen, Schnelzer, Olivero

On 25 August, Lief Ove Andsnes and the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra gave the UK première of *La mattina* (Piano Concerto No. 2) by Bent Sørensen. There were several sources which suggested elements of the work. After a performance by Andsnes of the Mozart 17th Piano Concert in Vienna, he and Sørensen went to a piano-bar where late at night Andsnes played a Busoni transcription of a Bach Chorale. Sørensen described the music as being 'something from the abyss that floats upwards and in the end became a halo over our heads,' and that experience provided the germ of the idea for the scenario as well as the character of the music of the work. The first of his concerto's five movements begins with dark-hued, quietly slow moving music low in the piano, in the manner of the Bach-Busoni Chorale. It is surrounded – shadowed, if you like – by wisps of music in the orchestra, played at the very edge of inaudibility, which gradually becomes more present, leading without a break into the luminous, high, scurrying music of the second movement, which enfolds the piano: it plays fragments whose occasional breaks leave shimmering motionless remnants of the orchestra's music.

The increasing intensity leads first to a flurry of guitar-like pizzicatos, and soon after to the sound of claves, played by members of the orchestra. The slow third movement expands the register and enriches the range of timbre of the orchestra, even as musical argument intensifies, followed by a claves-accompanied cadenza. The more tentative fourth movement, where the piano plays in alternation with the orchestra, portraying a sort of sunrise, leads to the vigorous *Presto* finale, whose music and texture are radiantly Mozartian, and which eventually spirals up into oblivion. The most immediately striking aspect of this work, as is the case with all of Bent Sørensen's music that this listener has encountered, is the delicately and carefully (one might well say 'exquisitely') heard sound of it. The subtle and compelling construction and argument of the piece becomes clearer over its progress from beginning to end. Andsnes and the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, which had played brilliantly the other works on the concert, by Mozart and Grieg, without a conductor

(and, in the Grieg, by memory), was conducted in the Sørensen by Per Kristian Skalstad. That performance was enthralling.

On 23 August the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Thomas Dausgaard, gave the first UK performance of their compatriot Albert Schnelzer's *A Freak in Burbank*, a tribute to the American director Tim Burton. While composing his work, Schnelzer was reading a biography of Burton; he tried to imagine and evoke Burton's life in 'the pastel-colored suburb' of Burbank, California, where Burton grew up, and to suggest the loneliness and sorrow as well as the manic, moderately destructive playfulness which he felt sure must have characterized Burton's childhood. The other influence on the work was Haydn, and it in fact has the general outline of the first movement of a Haydn Symphony, beginning with slow music – or at least long notes, initiated by somewhat grotesque flurries and sporadic short twitches, predicting the speed of the fast music that follows. The rollicking fast music is eventually interrupted by plaintive slower music, shimmering with hints of the fast tempo, which morphs into the introduction and is elided with the recapitulation. The climax of the work, almost at its very end, momentarily combines both the musics before ending with a bang. The language of the piece is neo-classical and tonal. Dausgaard and the orchestra performed it with energy and humor, and with obvious enjoyment.

Apart from the usual nightly or more Proms concerts that happened in the Albert Hall, there were two subsidiary series which the BBC presented under the auspices of the Proms at Cadogan Hall in Sloane Square: a chamber music series on Monday afternoons and a Saturday Matinée series. The instalment of the latter which happened on 21 August was presented by the early music vocal ensemble I Fagiolini (whose director is Robert Hollingworth) and the Britten Sinfonietta, conducted by Ryan Wigglesworth, with Lawrence Power, violist, and Ian Watson, accordion player, as soloists. The very interesting program paired pieces of early music with modern works which were either based on that piece, or otherwise associated with it.

After a performance of *Flow My Tears* by Dowland (which is the version of his Lachrymae tune with words), Power and the Britten Sinfonia played *Lacrymae* by Britten. Even though the title suggests a connexion with the Dowland tune in question, the Britten piece is actually meditative variations on another Dowland song, *Can She Excuse* (presumably Britten thought *Lacrhrymae* was a better, more evocative title). After I Fagiolini sang *Tristis est anima mea* and *Moro, lasso, al mio duio* by Gesualdo, the Britten Sinfonia played *Carlo* by Bret Dean. Carlo is a sort of memorial to 26 October 1590, which was the night on which Gesualdo's unfaithful first wife and her lover were murdered – either, according to legend, by Gesualdo himself, or, at least, certainly at his instigation. Dean's work begins with a recording of *Moro, lasso*, which begins to expand as the orchestra enters, by the addition of bits of other Gesualdo madrigals. Over the course of the intensely dramatic piece, the orchestral music, which is more 'modern' and impassioned, completely engulfs the tape of the actual vocal music by Gesualdo.

Betty Olivero began the work which became *Neharo't Neharo't* during the fierce war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon during the summer of 2006. Moved by the television images of victims, corpses, and mourners on both sides, she wrote a piece which was about laments and mourning. Her work uses the work of professional mourners in various Mediterranean countries, both recorded and transcribed for instruments, along with music derived from Monteverdi's *Madrigals of Love and War* and Orfeo's lament from *Orfeo*. The earlier part of the piece involves impassioned, florid melismas exchanged between the viola and accordion soloists, accompanied by two string orchestras – building up, both in texture and volume, to the climax of the piece, which is the moment at which the actual recordings of the mourners are introduced. From that point the work unwinds its intensity. Olivero, in her use of the soloist in contrast to the orchestras, represents the relationship between the individual and the group to which he/she belongs. As the music recedes from the climax, occasional soloists from the orchestra detach themselves from the orchestra, portraying the more personalized experience of other individuals in the collective. *Neharo't Neharo't* means 'Rivers Rivers' in Hebrew, evoking rivers of blood and tears that are shed by mourning women in disastrous situations; however Olivero also intended to imply hope, since the root of the Hebrew word 'nahar' (river) resembles the word 'nehara', meaning 'ray of light.' The rapturous intensity of *Neharo't Neharo't* was matched by that of the performance, particularly from the soloists, Powers and Watson. It was preceded on the concert by *Lamento della ninfa* and the end of Act Two of *Orfeo* by Monteverdi.

Rodney Lister

(3) Colin Matthews, Arvo Pärt and Tansy Davies

Colin Matthews's Violin Concerto (2009) has already been performed in the UK, its world première given by the City of Birmingham SO in their home city in 2009, but it is excellent that the same soloist and conductor (Leila Josefowicz, who clearly loves the piece, and Oliver Knussen, this time with the BBC SO) wanted to afford it the wider audience that the Proms and Radio 3 broadcasts bring. This is a fine concerto and all the more welcome because, unusually for a contemporary concerto, it is not a showy one.

In fact, although the soloist plays pretty much continuously throughout the first movement of this 20-minute work, the material that Josefowicz has to work with is not obviously rich – subtlety and transparency being the order of the day. Both of its two movements are sub-divided into shorter ones, each with a particular mood. Thus the first movement alternates its opening *sognando* – high sustained violin notes against glittering, muted orchestral accompaniment (Matthews eschews trumpets for the less intrusive flugelhorns throughout) with a faster and slightly rougher-edged *scherzando* where the soloist has a distinctive repeated figure. Just as the *sognando* section is intercut by a near-pastoral moment in the soloist's lower register, so the *scherzando* threatens to break in to one of Matthews's famous *perpetuum mobile* moments. The self-deprecatory composer referred in a pre-Prom talk to the 'running on the spot' tendency that such episodes in his music have. Just when you think the *scherzando* is going to gather up to a tutti, the soloist subtly slows down and we are back in the drifting first section.

The second movement, though the same length as the first, opens with a funereal tolling rhythm in both solo and orchestral parts that, often repeated, sets a darker tone. The trajectory of this richer, more complex and more virtuosic movement is a struggle to break free from that static melancholy opening. The three-note motif with which the movement began is quickened, given exuberant wing – Josefowicz visibly strains to put her back into as much expression as she can muster, playing entirely from memory. The orchestral texture thickens, without becoming overwhelming, but the double- and triple-stopping collides with the orchestra in an exciting if somewhat predictable climax. A *presto* conclusion, flexatone almost literally whipping the orchestra in its dash to the finish-line seems only fitting.

Norman Lebrecht, in his waspish *The Complete Companion to Twentieth-Century Music* (2000) accuses Colin and David Matthews of insufficiently distinguishing their styles from one another. It is true that both have pastoral tendencies but – without wanting to take issue with Lebrecht's provocative prose – Colin seems more attracted to the 'dark pastoral', to borrow the title of David's version of a fragment of Vaughan Williams' Cello Concerto, also given at this year's Proms. What is more, Colin's brilliant transcription of the 'Sonnet' from Britten's *Nocturne*, given at the pre-Proms Radio 3 Composer Portrait, shows us, in his words, 'Britten at his most Mahlerian'. Mahler, the modern pastoralist without equal, remains a potent ancestor figure for Colin, from his completion (with David) of the Tenth Symphony to the première of *Crossing the Alps* (reviewed in *Tempo* vol. 64, No. 253), described as a response to Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony. What is particularly impressive about this new concerto is that while being as concise and unflamboyant as Mahler is sprawling and self-aggrandizing, some aspect of Mahler's seriousness, some of his genius in transforming simple material, utterly seeps into and infuses Matthews's still very English vision.

When Arvo Pärt was in his serialist phase, symphonies came at regular intervals: his First in 1960 and his Third, in which the first stirrings of his later style were discernible, in 1971. Since his breakthrough with *Cantus i. m. Benjamin Britten* (1977) there have been no more symphonies until his Fourth in 2008, which the Los Angeles PO premièred under Salonen in the following year. To coincide with the release of this world première performance on CD [ECM New Series 2160], the same conductor gave the work its UK debut with the Philharmonia. The composer himself was in attendance, and the audience which received him rapturously at the end had clearly turned up in force to see a composer who has achieved both popular and critical acclaim since that simple, bell-resounding slow progression of the late 1970s paid memorial tribute at the Proms in August 1979.

The Fourth Symphony incorporates Pärt's 2007 piece for strings and percussion *These Words* (based on a Russian text, 'Prayer from Canon to the Holy Guardian Angel') and is similarly scored, with the percussion section augmented by harp and timpani. It harks back to the extreme simplicity of *Cantus,* in mood and orchestration rather than taking up the vaunted 'new departure' of *Lamentate* (2003). The Philharmonia's strings were smoother, more blended than the Los Angeles players on CD, the Americans more dramatic in the sections where the music yearns and strains onwards.

The symphony also bears the sub-title 'Los Angeles' and this no mere flattery of the Californian orchestra. Pärt's religious vision

views guardian angels as part of the fabric of our universe. Whatever one makes of this, the symphony's opening section (the first movement has three sections) sees the familiar slow, static, mournful string cadences touched by the – angelic – light of crotales or harps. To invoke angels is, to the contemporary sensibility, to invite mawkishness, but Pärt's writing characteristically does not swell, quicken or stutter but passes with plain simple assurance from one sustained chord to the next.

The following short section *Marcando con maestà* is more dramatic, as a phalanx of unison strings attempt to move nobly forward, echoed by an increasingly resonant combination of cymbals, tubular bells and harp, before the *Pacato* (calm) section returns us to the gently resigned atmosphere of the opening. There are subtle harmonic parallels between these two short movements: in both, an upward striving is quietly calmed, as if – the simile comes naturally – by the silent gesture of an angel.

Hesitancy and silence have been among Pärt's chief stylistic markers: long-note motifs gently swell only to disappear reverently into the darkness. There's a certain formality, a stylized gestural grace about Pärt that saves his music from sentimentality and religiosity but that can also undermine his attempts to write longer passages of sustained textural interest, since neither rhythmic nor harmonic surprise are normally part of his intentions. The end of the second movement, then, with its uncertainties – the bass harmonies lost, the strings and metal percussion uncertain in the darkness – is an almost colourist coup for an essentially conservative composer, even if it is over-extended. If the last movement disappoints, it is only because of Pärt's potential weaknesses – unvaried textures, a feeling of drifting if the melodic material isn't prominent enough – are to the fore in the opening section. The Coda, marked *Deciso*, does not, unfortunately, impress with any decisiveness and is not the finale this otherwise impressive symphony merits.

That said, the symphony is not Pärt's natural home, hence the 37-year gap since his previous one; and one wonders if extended-scale orchestral works (the symphony comes in a shade under 40 minutes) are the most appropriate form for a talent which triumphs in the creation of immaculate, self-contained moments rather than the dramatic wrangle that is the symphony. Since the austere genius of *Tabula Rasa* in 1977, there's been no orchestral piece longer than 15 minutes, and no piece for full symphony orchestra – as opposed to the habitual string orchestra – at all. The near-exception, *Lamentate* for piano and full orchestra, is outlandishly and uncharacteristically dramatic and moodily reflective by turns, but ultimately unconvincing, as if Pärt didn't really believe in its new territories. The new symphony is a return to safer ground in which, if not miracles, then genuinely satisfied appreciation can be seen.

According to the 37 year-old Tansy Davies, music is 'sorcery' as her brand-new orchestral piece *Wild Card* sets out to show. More surprisingly, an orchestra is described as 'unwieldy'. She meant the latter comment as a kind of praise for the sheer weight and unsettling power that such forces can bring. Anyone familiar with her music for small ensembles such as *grind show (electric)*, *salt box* or *neon*, all on display at the pre-Prom Composer Portrait, will recall their winning rhythmic lopsidedness. Dance-like rhythms that are disturbingly irregular are part of her stock-in-trade.

At around 20 minutes, *Wild Card* is her longest piece for orchestra to date and, unsurprisingly, Davies frequently handles the orchestra as if it were a set of endlessly re-combinable chamber ensembles. The piece takes its name from the 22 cards that form the Major Arcana of the Tarot pack. Thus some of the characters represented include The Chariot, The Devil, Justice and so on. The Hierophant, for example, is in Davies's characterization 'a highly rhythmical proclamation from the woodwinds in ecstatic union, strengthened further by an energetic drum pattern'. Except that in this performance the woodwinds are not in ecstasy. They are shrill, spiky and in-yer-face, and the largely unvaried pattern of semiquavers in the bongo line serves not so much to strengthen the winds as ignore it. This is characteristic Davies and can be heard again in 'The High Priestess' where the 'strident melody' (her description) on woodwinds trips and stumbles in a typically dislocated rhythm while the percussionists (cabasa and guiro) have their own repeated jerking-forward figure.

Compared to pieces for chamber orchestra such as the impressive *Patterning* (2000) which helped to establish Davies's name, the concern for and delight in instrumental sound seems to be largely absent. So often in the 20 or so short sections that make up *Wild Card*, Davies juxtaposes dissimilar orchestral sections and rhythmic patterns as if that itself were sufficient. *Patterning*, ostensibly less concerned with drawing characters, is full of sharply-etched dialogues between dissimilar instruments. *Neon* (2004) which is a kind of proto-*Wild Card* in its jousting conversations between winds and percussion is snappier, funkier and more fun this new piece.

There are successful sections in *Wild Card*, such

as 'The Moon and the Sun' where the range of orchestral sonorities – rapidly-trilling flutes, buzzing scale-descending trumpets, wind-machine and all – add up to a unique, unsettling and wonderfully expressive landscape. There's often something machine-like or system-oriented about Davies's scores and this, allied to a default trope of short, staccato patterns, frequently produces a grudging, even forbidding quality. At its best, in the last three sections – 'Moon and Sun', 'Judgement' and 'The World' – *Wild Card* breaks new ground for Davies and shows her to be an orchestrator of colour and originality. How enchanted the BBC SO were with this I'm not certain. The somewhat perfunctory handshake between composer and Maestro Bělohlávek might have indicated a less than full commitment. Davies has magic, certainly, but she just might want to use it more seductively when she plays her cards next time.

Robert Stein

(4) Watkins, Dillon, Turnage, Musgrave, Jackson, Holloway

Huw Watkins's Violin Concerto was one of the most enjoyable works specially commissioned by the BBC for the 2010 Proms season. A dramatic, virtuosic vehicle for its soloist Alina Ibragimova, the concerto was also notable for its subtly textured and artfully restrained orchestral contributions, such as the magical use of harp in the central *Andante*. This extended nocturnal movement had an intensely lyrical introspection and expressive freedom, together with an enigmatic quality that contrasted well with the brilliant, pyrotechnical displays in the *Allegro molto* outer movements, though even these contained brief, songlike interludes. One of Watkins's most impressively assured achievements, the Violin Concerto makes me look forward to further works for large-scale forces from this composer. The BBC Symphony Orchestra, under Edward Gardner, gave alert and crisply articulated support, but this was the gifted and admirably individual young violinist Ibragimova's piece and she took all the opportunities it afforded her to display the full range of her musicianship.

Receiving its rather belated first performance in the UK some nine years after it was premièred, James Dillon's *La Navette* also made a strong impact. The French title suggests a weaving shuttle: *La Navette* was written around the same time as Dillon's music-theatre piece, *Philomela*, a violent tale from Ovid in which Philomela is raped by her brother-in-law, who has her tongue cut out to prevent her revealing the truth, but she weaves a cloth that tells her story. Dillon fashioned a hypnotic tapestry of sound, achieving a machine-like cumulative power in an orchestral canvas teeming with pulsing percussive rhythms and convulsive twitches and tremors. It could be heard as a darker, more sinister relative of *Spinning Jenny*, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's orchestral tone-poem based on the Manchester and Salford cotton mills which shadowed the landscapes of his youth; yet Dillon's piece, seemingly fuelled by the horrors of its mythological inspiration, is much more relentless and terrifying than Davies's evocative and sometimes wistful personal recollection. *La Navette* wields a vast orchestra with unfailing invention and the BBCSSO and Brabbins responded with a detailed and nuanced reading.

'I don't want to write old man's music' declared Mark-Anthony Turnage, referring to *Hammered Out*, a co-commission by the BBC and the LA Philharmonic written to celebrate the composer's 50th birthday. He certainly avoided doing so in one of his most concentrated and rough-hewn works to date. Premièred by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under David Robertson, it brought together Turnage's love of a wide variety of musical styles, including jazz funk, gospel and soul in one explosive, extrovert gesture. Much has been written elsewhere on the striking similarity of the main themes of Turnage's new piece to Beyonce's best-selling hit 'Single Ladies (Put a Ring On It)'. Some commentators have gone so far as to declare it a 'cover version', but the organic way in which Turnage develops these materials is of greater account. Appropriately celebratory in tone, this 15-minute orchestral toccata began with attention-grabbing tutti 'hammer blows' (presaging the climax of Turnage's forthcoming opera for Covent Garden, *Anna Nicole*) and proceeded to exploit the composer's considerable technical skills with bluesy rhythms suggesting a bold and brilliant mixture of James Brown and Stravinsky, with occasional dashes of Messiaen. Obsessive motifs threaded and looped their way through the substantial forces, augmented by whip, sleigh bells, soprano saxophones, bass guitar and even a household hammer! Refreshingly rugged and bubbling with an intense, hard-driven energy, *Hammered Out* may not be Turnage's most subtle or profound statement, but it retains many of his best qualities, including an innate ability to communicate directly with an audience, the determination to explore fully all the possibilities of his material (also evident in another recent Turnage orchestral piece, *Scherzoid*) and an inventive, proudly eclectic approach to orchestration. David Robertson caught the raucous, upbeat mood of the piece, whilst containing its poten-

tially wild excesses with a fastidious attention to detail; the BBCSO revelled in its edgy, obsessive qualities with wonderfully tight ensemble playing, especially from the brass section.

By way of contrast, two refined first performances for voices featured in an afternoon concert at Cadogan Hall given by the BBC Singers and David Hill. Thea Musgrave's *Ithaca* was a setting of a translation of a text by the Greek poet Cavafy that celebrates the homecoming of Odysseus. In the score's prefatory remarks, Musgrave compares the text to the journey of life, with all its trials and challenges. Set in eight-part polyphony, this was a surprisingly relaxed and opulent work. Musgrave incorporated the word 'Ithaca' between verses to emphasize the journey's destination and in her marvellously controlled and steadily unfolding piece there was never any danger of being detained by perilous incidents along the way. Concluding the same concert, Gabriel Jackson's *In nomine Domini* was an elaborate setting of John Bradburne's poem of that title. Also inspired by the 'In nomine' section from John Taverner's *Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas*, it was scored for chorus, string quartet, harp and percussion. Melismatic choral writing, including extensive ecstatic solos, was juxtaposed with increasingly florid meditations on Taverner's original, for string quartet. David Hill expertly directed the BBC Singers, members of the Endymion Ensemble and the Arditti String Quartet in this glowing and poignant celebration of old and new.

Gianandrea Noseda conducted the BBC Philharmonic in the first performance of a Proms commission to mark the bi-centenary of Schumann's birth, Robin Holloway's *RELIQUARY*: *Scenes from the Life of Mary, Queen of Scots*. Like Holloway's *Fantasy Pieces* of 1971, the new work embeds a complete Schumann song-cycle inside a freshly composed instrumental commentary. In the case of *RELIQUARY*, Holloway reworks Schumann's austere and fragile last song-cycle, *Gedichte der Königin Maria Stuart*, which sets poems of Mary, Queen of Scots written when she was imprisoned by Queen Elizabeth. The songs are presented within the framework of a muted, melancholic orchestral narrative of Mary's life, including a prologue, epilogue and interludes between each song. The re-workings were deftly achieved, fleshing out Schumann's sometimes bare originals: the celesta and much-divided strings' atmospheric 'halo' effect in the second song was perhaps the most striking of Holloway's poetic touches.

The orchestral interpolations added psychological resonances to the text, so that a tabor-like drum evoking Mary's memories of dancing at the French court in her youth in the first Entr'acte (entitled Sarabande-Bourée) is transmogrified into an accompaniment to the scaffold in the final Entr'acte, which was also distinguished by a richly expressive viola solo. The substantial Epilogue gathered together previous material in an appropriately dignified and poignant leave-taking. Noseda and the BBC Philharmonic were responsive and sympathetic in their accompaniments and scene-settings, whilst soprano Dorothea Röschmann brought the starkly melancholic texts to life. Distanced and rendered even more ethereal by being presented within the vast spaces of the Royal Albert Hall, Holloway's delicate, deeply individual re-imagining of Schumann's last song cycle afforded one of the most quietly satisfying musical experiences of the season.

Paul Conway

The Fifteenth Israeli Music Festival

Inaugurated in 1998, the annual Israeli Music Festival made a leap forward five years ago with the appointment of composer, pedagogue, and scholar Michael Wolpe (b. 1960) as Musical Director. This year the Festival spanned five days (11–15 September), and five major cities, with 16 events. The auditoriums for the five symphonic concerts were full to capacity, and there was an impressive attendance at the afternoon chamber concerts.

The festival opened in Haifa. Performed by the fine Haifa Orchestra under Roi Oppenheim, the programme was an illustration of the pluralism which has dominated Israeli art music from its inception. The central work was the Piano Concerto (1953) by Joseph Tal, one of the 'founding fathers' of Israeli music (immigrated from Berlin 1934) who died two years ago at the age of 98. The concerto was an intense composition with rich harmony and motoristic rhythms, brilliantly executed by Amit Dolberg. The concert opened with a première of a beautifully written and richly orchestrated symphonic poem by Zohar Sharon (b. 1978) which revealed his sincere attachment to early Israeli music. Guitar player Yaron Hason (b. 1961) performed his arrangements of Yemenite traditional songs, with a syncretistic orchestration by Russian born Sergei Abir. The Jewish tradition of the St. Petersburg School (founded in 1908 by Yoel Engel) was alive and well in the well-written *Seven Jewish Dances* by Emanuel Vahl (b. 1938).

On Sunday the festival moved to the town of Givataim. The Ensemble 'Meitar' ('String') performed chamber works. I especially liked the

crystalline, gentle sounds in Hana Ajiashvilli's (b. 1972) *Sound Colours*, and the emotional expression in *Diptych* for violin and ten instruments by Yinam Leef (b. 1953). Menahem Zur (b. 1942) surprised in a humoristic jazz-like work. The evening concert featured a powerful piano concerto by Irena Svetova, an immigrant from the Soviet Union, bursting with energy in the manner of Bartók's Second Piano Concerto, and brilliantly executed by Revital Hachamoff in duet with an excellent timpani player whose name escaped me. The festival then charmed the audience with arrangements of moving popular songs by one of Israel's greatest composers, David Zehavi (1910–1977).

On Monday the southern city of Be'er Sheva hosted the festival at the recently opened Performing Arts Centre. To my taste the avant-garde programme of Ensemble Nickel featured no more than annoying effects which aspire to some alleged symbolic meanings, especially *Sahaf* by Haya Chernowin (b. 1957). The good Israel Sinfonietta then presented four premières by Tovy Meshoulam, a virtuoso piccolo work by Avi Eilam-Amsalag performed by Lior Eitan, a work well-written, albeit too academic, by Alex Wassermann and an overemotional and unbalanced concerto by Eliezer Alper.

Held at the beautiful Tel Aviv Art Museum, the third day included a retrospective concert of excellent music by veteran composer André Hajdu (b. 1932), who moderated in a moving personal style.

The night performance was a production of Moshe Zorman's opera *The Ghost's Inn*, based on poet Nathan Altermann's symbolic play. The music was melodious and pleasant, but hardly did justice to the high poetic qualities of the classical play, nor did the grotesque staging by Dan Ehrlich fit the drama.

Held in Jerusalem, the last day hosted the ceremony of granting the prestigious Prime Minister Prize. The evening performance brought the festival to its apex. The Jerusalem Symphony directed by Daniel Cohen revived a work neglected since its première in the early 1960s, the beautiful *The Eternal Theme*, by Paul Ben-Haim (1897–1984), one of the greatest of the 'founding fathers'. Yossi Arenheim alternated three flutes in the fascinating concerto by Yosef Bardanashvilli (b. 1948), who immigrated from Georgia in 1995. The festival collaborated with the Jerusalem Festival of *Piut* – the rich repertory of religious paraliturgical songs of the Sefardi Jews. Two fine *Paytanim* – performers of the traditional repertory – and the superb Iranian-born singer and researcher Maureen Nehedar performed inspired arrangements by Nissim Halifa, Adir Levi, Hai Meirzada, and Dan Deutsch for a packed house.

One should bear in mind that Israeli art music is also that which general audiences used to treat with suspicion as 'modern'. Yet through dedication and hard work, collaborating with Paul Landau, General Director of Israeli Musical Institute, and producer Rosalia Heifetz, Michael Wolpe has achieved his goal: Israeli audiences now cherish the 'modern' music by its own composers!

Jehoash Hirshberg

Bregenz: Festival 'In der Fremde' – music of Mieczysław Weinberg

Mieczysław Weinberg: In Search of Freedom by David Fanning. Wolke Verlag, €29.

'Die Macht der Musik – Mieczysław Weinberg: Eine Chronik in Tönen', *Osteuropa*, Vol. 60, No. 7, July 2010. Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, €22.

WEINBERG: Symphony No. 1 in G minor, op. 10; Cello Concerto in C minor, op. 43. Dmitry Khrychov (vlc); St Petersburg State Academic Symphony Orchestra c. Alexander Titov. Northern Flowers NF/PMA 9973.

WEINBERG: Symphonies Nos. 1 in G minor and 7 in C major, opp. 10 and 81. Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, c. Thord Svedlund. Chandos CHSA 5078.

There's an enormous feeling of gratification when one sees a composer for whose music one has long held a candle make a breakthrough that, even allowing for wishful thinking, one can term decisive. For Mieczysław Weinberg that moment appears to have come with the 2010 Bregenz Festival which put his music on the map more emphatically than any series of CDs could do – even though recordings are gradually beginning to catch up with Weinberg's huge output. The jewel in the crown was the stage première, in the Bregenz Festspielhaus on 21 July, of the first – and in his own view finest – of his seven operas, *Passazhirka*, op. 97 (1967–68); no single English word conveys that the passenger of the title is female. The next major element was the west-European première of the sixth opera, *The Portrait*, op. 128 (1980).[2] (Both operas, gratifyingly, were sold out.) There were also orchestral concerts, featuring the Seventeenth Symphony, *Memory*, op. 137 (1982–84), with Vladimir Fedoseyev conducting the Vienna Symphony Orchestra on 25 July; the Sixth Symphony, op. 79 (1962–63), and the Requiem, op. 96 (1965–66), again with Fedoseyev

[2] *Passazhirka* was given a concert performance in Moscow on Christmas Day, 2006. *The Portrait* was first performed in Brno on 20 May 1983.

and the VSO, with Elena Kesselidi as the soprano soloist, on 1 August; the First Flute Concerto, op. 75 (1961), soloist Maria Fedotova, and Second Sinfonietta, op. 74 (1960), later the same day, with Teodor Currentzis conducting MusicAeterna (the chamber orchestra of Novosibirsk Opera); the *Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes*, op. 47, No. 1 (1949), and Chamber Symphony No. 4, op. 153 (1992), again with Currentzis and his Siberians, on 2 August; the First Sinfonietta, op. 41 (1948), and Trumpet Concerto, op. 94 (1966–67), soloist Jürgen Ellensohn, with Gérard Korsten conducting the Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra on 15 August; and, that evening, the Chamber Symphony No. 1, op. 145 (1987), with the Ensemble Dolby's Around. A couple of chamber concerts were dropped into the interstices, with the Piano Quintet, op. 18 (1944 – perhaps Weinberg's first masterpiece), *Three Palms*, op. 120 (1977), for soprano and string quartet, and *Jewish Songs*, op. 13 (1944), on 25 July; and the String Trio, op. 48 (1950), and Cello Sonata No. 2, op. 63 (1958–59), on 8 August. And for three days (31 July–2 August) in the middle of this swirl of music, a symposium in the Festspielhaus brought together Weinberg scholars and enthusiasts, his family and other friends, performers (not least the Danel Quartet from Brussels, whose Cpo series of the string quartets is now four CDs strong[3]), directors and stage designers. I don't know of any neglected composer compensated in such a grand manner. Of course, such intense attention can expose weaknesses, but Weinberg emerged stronger than before, with his standing as one of the 20th century's major composers no longer in doubt. He requires only the tiniest gesture for his music to be instantly recognizable, and the weaker moments are weak only in terms of the absolute security of his best pieces, which have a penetrating emotional clarity. It now remains only to tell the rest of the world.

Both *The Passenger* and *The Portrait* will be doing their share of telling, since further productions of both operas are in the offing: between now and 2013 *The Passenger* will be staged in Madrid, Warsaw, Tel Aviv and London, with US opera houses to follow; and *The Portrait* opens at The Grand Theatre, Leeds, on 2 February 2011. Those of us attending the symposium were thrown in at the operatic deep end: *The Passenger* before lunch on 31 July, and *The Portrait* that same evening.

The Passenger is based on a novel by Zofia Posmysz, once a prisoner herself in Auschwitz and a dignified and lucid presence at the Bregenz symposium. In the libretto – adapted from the original by Alexander Medvedev, whose death only two weeks before the symposium tinged it with sadness – a German diplomat and his wife, Lisa, are travelling by liner to Brazil, where he is to take up a posting. She sees another passenger, someone she was sure had died in Auschwitz, where Lisa, as she now reveals to her husband, was an overseer. A first flashback takes the action back to the camp itself, where the extraordinary composure of Martha, the mysterious passenger, seems to have a strange control over Lisa. In Act 2, which takes place mostly in flashback in Auschwitz, Martha is briefly reunited with Tadeusz, her fiancé, who has been sent to collect a violin, since the commandant has ordered him to play a concert for the Nazi officers, to include the commandant's favourite waltz. Now, 'back' on the boat, the passenger asks the ship's band to play the 'Governor's Waltz' – the one weak point in David Pountney's moving production: when the passenger approaches the band with her request (a detail not required by the music), she confirms that she is indeed Martha, but until that single literalist gesture the entire drama could as easily be playing out in Lisa's tortured conscience, her guilt projected onto a random character on the ship. The climax of the opera comes during the Auschwitz concert where, in front of the assembled officers and inmates, Tadeusz performs not the expected waltz but the Chaconne from the Bach D minor Partita, played to tremendous impact by the first and second violin sections in the orchestra – in effect, throwing German culture back in the faces of the men who had traduced it. Uproar breaks out, Tadeusz's violin is smashed, and he is led away to execution. The Epilogue is given over to an extensive rumination by Martha.

Johan Engels' set had the scenes on the liner superposed over those in Auschwitz, the squeaky-clean whites above contrasting starkly with the grimy dirt below – where the mobile parts of the set were moved around on railway lines, a perennial symbol of the Holocaust.

In the First Act at least, Weinberg's music is surprisingly low-key: although the opera begins with a ferocious percussion tattoo, the music seems to prefer to keep its head down – Weinberg weaves allusions to jazz, folk-music, Beethoven and more,[4] using the orchestra in the First Act and, often, the reminiscences of the prisoners in the Second. There are echoes, too, of Britten,

[3] Nos. 4 and 16 are on 777 313-2 (2007), Nos. 7, 11 and 13 on 777 392-2 (2008), Nos. 6, 8 and 15 on 777 393-2 (2009) and Nos. 5, 9 and 14 on 777 394-2 (2010); the fifth instalment, with Nos. 1, 3 and 10 and the *Aria* and *Capriccio*, will be on 777 566-2.

[4] I noted them down as best I could but found that in the dark I had written them one on top of the other in a spaghetti of unintelligible lines.

especially *Peter Grimes*. Weinberg's language is a naturally tonal one but, like Shostakovich, he can steer freely into atonality, using it here especially to heighten tension. Anyone producing art 'about' the Holocaust – or, indeed, any of mankind's occasional systematic savageries – walks a fine line between exculpatory abstraction and representation so authentic that it obscures any message the artist may have to impart. Weinberg's path is one of restraint: years after the event, he learned that his parents and sister had been murdered in Trawniki, but there is no outpouring of personal feeling here. Few of the early reviews seem to have noticed that Posmysz's book, and so Medvedev's and Weinberg's opera, is not 'about' the Holocaust: Auschwitz held Polish political prisoners long before it became an extermination camp for the Jews, and the attraction of the novel for Weinberg may indeed have been that it offered him a proxy, allowing him to write about acts of individual courage in defiance of the machine that killed his family without having to set the machinery itself to music. And even if his score is rarely assertive, it is constantly inventive, and to cumulative effect: I know I was not the only person to emerge blinking into the afternoon sun with that sense of emotional catharsis you get from a close encounter with great art, that feeling of being exhausted and elated at the same time. There's plainly much more to be heard and understood in *The Passenger*; fortunately, it seems that there will be repeated opportunities to do so both live and at home: I hear tell that a DVD may be made available.

This performance – ours was the fourth presentation – kept the electricity running high: the soprano Elena Kesselidi and mezzo Michelle Breedt dominated the stage as Martha and Lisa, but were supported by strong singing and acting from a host of subsidiary roles. In the pit Teodor Currentzis obtained the kind of playing from the Vienna Symphony Orchestra that suggested they knew they were involved in something important.

There could hardly be starker contrast than with *The Portrait*, a three-acter in eight scenes, again to a libretto by Medvedev, this time after a short story by Gogol that appeared in his *St Petersburg Tales* in 1835, the source also of Shostakovich's *The Nose* – and not its only connexion with Weinberg's opera. *The Portrait* has the same rapid-fire gruff humour, the same cynical view of life – also anchored, paradoxically, in a deep humanism. The plot is a recasting of the Faust legend: a young artist, Chartkov, though desperate for something to eat, spends his last kopek on a painting in a junkshop, a portrait of a usurer. When he hangs it in his garret, more money than he can contemplate falls from the frame – just as his landlord arrives to throw him out for non-payment. Chartkov vows to serve art but ends up prostituting his talent, becoming a sought-after society painter; the Petersburg elite throngs to his studio, eager to have his portraits bolster their various vanities. When he visits an exhibition by another painter newly returned from Italy, he realizes what he has done and his world crumbles apart; as he dies, he curses the portrait and the wealth it brought.

Weinberg's score bristles with witty invention, the cinematic cross-cutting keeping the narrative constantly fresh – with the orchestral writing (well served in the pit by the Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra under Rossen Gergov) ceaselessly responsive to the business on stage. The surprise, then, was how well the piece hangs together as a whole. Three devices were apparent, one in the music, the others on stage: a chorale-like figure heard near the beginning – which, the libretto suggests, denotes moderation and balance – returns at the close as a kind of unspoken judgement on the proceedings; and, in a good-*v*.-evil contrast, Chartkov's vision of Psyche, a symbol of eternally elusive feminine beauty, and the sinister figure of the usurer (both mimed according to the score, but imaginatively presented here in projection), criss-cross the action at critical moments; there are doubtless other cohesive elements at work in the music that familiarity will gradually reveal.

The three Bregenz performances took place in the Theater am Kornmarkt. In a cast with no fewer than 23 sung roles (allowing Weinberg the same freewheeling contrapuntal combinations as Shostakovich enjoyed in *The Nose*), Peter Hoare (tenor) and David Stout (baritone) stood out as Chartkov and Nikita, his manservant who, like Leporello, is less vainglorious, more realistic than his boss. James Fulljames's staging was a delight: Chartkov's garret revolved to reveal a wall of huge blocks against which the marbled elegance of Petersburg luxury could be projected – and images appear and vanish within frames hung upon it. This production was given in often incomprehensible German, which I thought I spoke, so I was relieved to discover afterwards that the locals had made as little of it as I had – why then not simply sing it in the original Russian? David Pountney, the mastermind behind the entire Weinberg extravaganza at Bregenz, later explained, first, that the Festival has a tradition of German-language productions at the Theater am Kornmarkt and, second, that there's no surtitling capacity there in any event. There was one small gain: by calling it *Das Portrait*, not the more usual *Das Porträt*, the borrowing from French underlined the artificiality of the society being sent up.

For all that tackling two such complex works in a single day means we must have missed much, one thing was clear: to the achievement of Weinberg the symphonist – now firmly established by recordings, beginning with the ground-breaking Olympia series of 17 CDs that was launched in 1994 – must now be added that of Weinberg the opera-composer. One can hardly claim that he was an influential figure: his operas have hitherto been as roundly ignored as, say, Korngold's music used to be in the concert-hall. But in terms of their musical merit alone, one can predict a bright future for them on the world's stages. After all, the Korngold Violin Concerto has now charmed its way into the mainstream.

All the works in the other concerts are, or have been, available on CD; the exception is the Requiem, which is in the pipeline from Naxos – a live recording of the first performance, given in Liverpool last November, which I reviewed in *Tempo* Vol. 64, No. 252 (April 2010). The Bregenz performance, though still well over the 53 minutes estimated by the composer (who never heard it), seemed more of a piece, more certain of its direction, its details more telling. This performance, too, is scheduled to appear on CD, when more detailed comparisons will be possible.

The Weinberg focus in Bregenz stood also as an unspoken tribute to two men, both Swedes, who played a central role in the Weinberg saga: Tommy Persson, now a retired judge, was a friend of the composer in the last years of his life, supplying him with the medicines that alleviated the discomfort of his final illness; and Per Skans who, starting with the booklet notes that accompanied the Olympia CDs, began to generate the first western scholarly assessment of Weinberg's huge output. Persson was in Bregenz to enjoy his friend's triumph, but Skans died in January 2007 – though not before making substantial progress on a monograph on Weinberg and his music which I, as Toccata Press, was standing ready to publish. Skans knew he was ill, and made sure that we knew where his material was, so that David Fanning, Britain's leading specialist in Soviet music, could take over if the worst came to the worst. It did, and he did, and I am promised a final text sometime next year. In the meantime, timed to coincide with the Bregenz Festival, Fanning has produced a most welcome study of Weinberg – brief in comparison with the book I can expect but sufficiently comprehensive to be as valuable to the cognoscenti of Weinberg's music as to newcomers. Within a biographical framework (itself the first to appear in English[5]) that is relatively simple in outline – Polish-Jewish childhood, flight before the Nazis, settlement in Moscow in 1943 – Fanning charts the evolution of Weinberg's style, gives thumbnail assessments of the more important pieces, adduces quotations from the composer and his more important friends and contemporaries. He completes the book with a discography and – most importantly – the first accurate and complete worklist to appear in print in English.[6]

Another valuable publication to appear in conjunction with the Bregenz Festival is a special Weinberg edition of *osteuropa*, a German academic periodical. An editorial introduction is followed by no fewer than 13 essays on Weinberg and his music, among them a general introduction by David Fanning, Jascha Nemtsov on the role of Weinberg's Jewishness in his obscurity, Wolfgang Mende on the importance of the 'Great Patriotic War' on Weinberg's output, Stefan Weiss on the extent to which the west was, or wasn't, aware of Soviet repression of composers; Reinhard Flender (his publisher at PeerMusic) on Weinberg's friendship with Shostakovich, Friedrich Geiger (appropriately enough) on the string quartets, Inessa Dvuzhilnaya on Jewish elements in Weinberg's music, Verena Mogl on the film music, and more; a free CD with the publication brings the Danel Quartet's recording of the Sixth String Quartet, op. 35 (1946) and Julia Rebekka Adler's viola version of the Clarinet Sonata, op. 28 (1945).[7] At over 200 pages it is a major addition to the Weinberg literature, and if it were in a set of hard covers with a title of its own it would be recognized as such. Perhaps an English-language publisher (not me: I have my hands full) could be persuaded to bring out a translation as *Weinberg Studies*.

Since, as well as Toccata Press, I also run the CD label Toccata Classics, I've known the joy of plugging a gap in the recorded repertoire turn into frustration on the discovery that someone else is headed for the same hole. So I sympathize with the St Petersburg label Northern Flowers – whose release of Weinberg's First Symphony, coupled with the Cello Concerto, constitutes the fifth volume of their invaluable series 'Wartime Music' – reached the market only months ahead of the next of Thord Svedlund's ongoing series of recordings of Weinberg orchestral music

[5] And in German, as the publisher, Wolke Verlag, simultaneously released a translation: *Mieczysław Weinberg: Auf der Suche nach Freiheit* (978-3-936000-90-0).

[6] The prelims can be read at http://www.wolke-verlag.de/Titel/pdf/Weine_Inhalt.pdf.

[7] A detailed table of contents and abstracts in German can be read at http://dl.oe.dgo-online.org/issues/dl/1007de.pdf.

on Chandos[8] – and the scrappy playing of the St Petersburg orchestra is no match for the secure standards of Gothenburg. Svedlund couples the First Symphony with the more familiar Seventh, which appeared as part of the Olympia series, just giving Weinberg time to see that interest in his music was growing in the west.

The First Symphony is a milestone for both external and internal reasons. It was the work which, when shown to Shostakovich in 1943, was to change Weinberg's life. He was then sheltering from the Nazis in Tashkent (a map in the beautifully produced Bregenz programme book underlined just how far Weinberg had fled: I hadn't realized that Tashkent is to the east of Samarkand and Bukhara and due north of Kabul), but Shostakovich was so impressed he arranged for him to receive permission to settle in Moscow, which remained Weinberg's home for the rest of his like. No wonder Shostakovich saw ability in his younger colleague: the music proves that from the start Weinberg had what Robert Simpson[9] memorably called 'the breath of a symphonist'. First symphonies are rarely Grand Statements, as Brahms's is (for its own reasons) and Sibelius's almost is, but they often indicate the incipient hand of the master, as do those of Beethoven, Bruckner, Nielsen, Shostakovich and many more. Weinberg joins this happy group: his First Symphony opens in a deceptively serenade-like manner which soon expands into symphonic dimensions, with a development section which reveals its composer as natural contrapuntist, assured orchestrator and epic poet. The *Lento* second movement, which maintains the serenade mood of the opening of the first, is another early manifestation of two Weinberg traits: the propensity of his melodies to have a Jewish cast, and his ability to write tunes which seem to unravel over large spans of time. The *Vivace* scherzo manages to be angular and good-natured at the same time (David Fanning's book points to the second movement of Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony as a possible model); and the *Allegro con fuoco* finale maintains the sense of organic symphonic growth. A master was making his mark.

Martin Anderson

[8] Gabriel Chmura and the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra recorded three Weinberg CDs for Chandos: Symphony No. 5, op. 76 (1962), and the First Sinfonietta, op. 41 (1948) appeared on CHAN 10128 (2003), Symphony No. 4, op. 61 (1947, rev. 1961), the Second Sinfonietta, op. 74 (1960) and *Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes*, op. 47, No. 1 (1949), on CHAN 10237 (2004); and Symphonies Nos. 14 and 16, opp. 117 and 131 (1977 and 1981) on CHAN 10334 (2006). Svedlund and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra then released the *Fantasia for Cello and Orchestra*, op. 52 (1951–53 – one of the 20th century's great cello concertos), the two Flute Concertos, opp. 75 and 148 (1961 and 1987) and the Clarinet Concerto, op. 104 (1970), on CHSA 5064 (2008). I am told that Naxos intends to record the symphonies, and perhaps other orchestral pieces, that will not feature in the Chandos series.

[9] Consciously or unconsciously echoing Schoenberg, who uses the same phrase of Sibelius and Shostakovich in his 1946 essay 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Music' (Ed.).

Liverpool, The Philharmonic Hall: Rodion Shchedrin's Oboe Concerto

Shchedrin's Oboe Concerto is a Euro-venture, a co-commission by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Dresdener Philharmonic and the Orchestre Nationale du Capitole de Toulouse. It is good to see the rising fortunes of the RLPO being used to commission new works at this international level. The UK première took place on Saturday 25 September with the RLPO conducted by Vassily Petrenko and their principle oboist Jonathan Small as the soloist.

As a genre, oboe concertos have presented post-Baroque composers with something of a problem of how to generate form. The solo instrument has a limited registral, timbral and dynamic range and the duration of the piece is necessarily restricted by the stamina of the soloist. Shchedrin's solution is to explore the plaintive-plangent qualities conventionally associated with the instrument and cast the concerto as a continuous three-movement structure: a highly episodic first section, a short slow interlude and a brisk march with epilogue. There are advantages and disadvantages with this. The continuity between movements is created through some effective processes of overlap and emergence. A long sustained f#‴ on solo oboe extends across the boundary of the first movement and is subtly echoed in flutes and piccolo at the start of the second. The dotted woodwind rhythm that appears out of the irresolute semi-tonal dyad at the end of the second movement hints at the sort of potential contained in the similar rhythm that executes the transition from the introduction into the first subject group of Beethoven's Fourth Symphony. Difficulties arise with the question of whether this deliberate blurring of boundaries is part of an organic plan or just a papering over of some rather fundamental structural cracks.

Ideas do cross movements, most obviously in the pastoral duetting between oboe and cor anglais and a pervasive, characteristic melodic fill of the interval of a third that is sometimes major, sometimes minor. And there is a sense of nostalgic narrative in which the solo oboe acts as a connective strand whilst other instruments befriend or

abandon it. The problem throughout the piece is a lack of transformation or development of these ideas. This is most obvious in the second movement where, after a four-bar brass introduction, the oboe and cor anglais interplay returns for just eight bars that achieve neither the status of distilled pastoral idyll nor a post-Modern contextualization of 'shepherding' music. Whilst the dotted momentum of the Finale does march on to achieve a couple of brief climaxes, even these are comfortable victories. Similarly the novelty timpani and tuba solos in the last movement peter out at the prospect of more prolonged exposure.

Shchedrin has created a piece that extends to 21 minutes. Unfortunately, despite the commitment and efforts of the RLPO, this felt like a very slight work.

Helen Thomas

Glasgow, University Concert Hall: Sorabji's 'Sequentia Cyclica'

The Latin chant *Dies Iræ*, generally attributed to Tommaso de Celano (1200–1260/70?), has preoccupied many composers from Charpentier and Lully via Liszt and Alkan to Carter and Stevenson; it obsessed Rakhmaninov. What drew Sorabji to it is undocumented although he would have known many examples from piano literature; his Variations and Fugue for piano on *Dies Iræ*, dedicated to Busoni's memory, was by far the most ambitious piece ever to have been based on it at its completion in 1926.

Sorabji later revisited this time-honoured theme in *Sequentia Cyclica super Dies Iræ*, an even mightier set of variations and fugue for piano, dedicated to Busoni's pupil Egon Petri. Although the score bears no clue as to how this immense stretch of music should be presented in performance, the inclusion of two intervals suggests itself; the points where these occur was decided by pianist Jonathan Powell who, having previously played sections of it, gave the whole its world première at Glasgow University Concert Hall in June 2010.

Glasgow has hosted Sorabji performances since the composer's four 1930s appearances there in concert series devised by Erik Chisholm, to whom he later wrote:

> I have completed the Sequentia Cyclica…a series of 27 movements on D.I. terminating in a gigantic 5tuple fugue with the most intricate Stretto Mæstrale … (it) was finished a week or two ago during a sharp attack of malaria (my 3rd).

Writing on the 22nd anniversary of Sorabji's death, I am reminded of the final gesture of this monumental work, reproduced from its manuscript in a page-long *Guardian* obituary.

Even at his life's end, Sorabji considered *Sequentia Cyclica* one of his finest compositions. At an unbelievable 430 minutes, it is by far the largest of his piano works yet to reach the concert platform. Jonathan Powell's renowned track record in Sorabji performance being peerless, expectations were understandably high for this momentous event. That his astonishing traversal included but 30 minutes of intervals made his unflagging mental and physical energies and concentration from first note to last the more astounding; that the composer provided no hint of *longueurs* in this vast tract is equally remarkable, especially as the whole is underpinned by a single theme on which one variation is a passacaglia with 100 variations of its own!

Sorabji subjects the theme to several unique characterisations, embracing *Ispanica*, an elaborate *valse de concert* and 'quasi Debussy', along with a more predictable yet succinct *marcia funebre* with palpable Alkanesque roots. Nothing within the piano's capabilities is left unexplored in this work. Its final movement, a typical Sorabjian *fuga monstrum*, again evidences the composer's uncanny gift for making no two fugues sound remotely similar; its many instances of expressive restraint become a wondrous foil for the sustained and vehement climax that crowns the entire work, demonstrating as elsewhere that Sorabji's penchant for piling Pelion upon Ossa, whilst second nature, never produces overbearing results.

An incredible hyper-pianistic feat and a compelling intellectual and emotional journey, *Sequentia Cyclica*'s creative virtuosity again instances Sorabji's gift for distinguishing real time from perceived time, its seeming duration being less than one-third of the actuality; in this, he continues a tradition whose most surprising case of all is perhaps his 9-hour-long Second Organ Symphony, premièred 12 days previously in the same city.[10]

June 2010; what a Sorabjian feast for Glasgow!

Alistair Hinton

London, Barbican: James MacMillan's Violin Concerto

The titles of the three movements of James MacMillan's new Violin Concerto: 'Dance', 'Song', and 'Song and Dance' are pointedly simple. One can see why he does this – MacMillan's

[10] The première of Organ Symphony No. 2 was reviewed by Brian Inglis in *Tempo* Vol. 64, No. 254 – Ed.

unpretentious directness of style is one of his virtues; so signalling singing and dancing, the roots of Scottish folk music, as the touchstones of the piece is reasonable enough: but the concerto goes far beyond the folksiness of *From Ayrshire* (2005) MacMillan's other piece for violin and orchestra, into a familiar landscape of oppression and ways of escape.

According to the composer's programme notes for this 12 May première, the first movement has three main elements, the first of which is a 'punchy refrain', a phrase that doesn't fully do justice to the slamming, *marcato* five-quaver motif that opens the piece and which descends like the clanking battery of percussion in *Confession of Isobel Gowdie* upon the orchestra with great frequency. Against this, the soloist's 'jerky theme' is not some irregular dance but a nervous scurrying-away or taking flight in slow, high-register writing that, with its grace-notes and reminiscences of Scottish ballads, views the 19th century as the land of refuge.

In the second movement, 'Song', there is a similar harking-back of musical style. The soloist is once again very much to the fore, playing against simple, stripped-down orchestral accompaniments, materials that in turn are based on fragments of old Scottish or Irish tunes – though never sounding fragmentary – or on trills, up-and-down runs, or other soulfully expressive tropes that call to mind Max Bruch or Samuel Barber. Such names are in marked contrast to the two composers who MacMillan mentioned in a pre-concert talk as particular favourites: Gubaidulina and Schnittke. Superficially, MacMillan's sudden glimpses of whirling reels (in the first movement) or elaborately embellished solo writing (in the second) might seem to parallel Schnittke's poly-stylism, but in Schnittke there is a sense of irony, of an ambivalent attitude to the past: whereas MacMillan, for all of this concerto's many expressive virtues, seems sometimes to be yearning to be a 19th-century composer, collecting folk-songs in a notebook and giving the soloist – the superb Vadim Repin – plenty of authentic opportunities to show off.

As signalled by the LSO male chorus's opening declaration *'eins, zwei, drei, vier, meine Mutter tanzt mit mir'* (it is all they have to do, and they looked uncomfortable with it) the third movement has a rather German expressionist feel. In 'Song and Dance', the movement indeed makes a bit of a fuss of itself, as does the soloist who has for a time a *doppelgänger*, the orchestra's leader, filling in the quieter passages. However the atmosphere of the opening soon gives way to some gentle memories of sedate waltzes and *thés-dansant*, wah-wah brass and all: Malcolm Arnold is there somewhere. The 25-minute concerto is dedicated to the composer's late mother who was a young woman in 1950s Scotland. The movement builds up to a dance of death, with the reeling fiddler stalked from the bass depths by percussion. From bar 212, however, a different mood prevails, as female voices intone *'funf, sechs, seiben, Bist du hinter das blaue Glas gegangen?' (five, six, seven, have you passed on to the blue heaven?)*. Immediately the orchestra opens up with a titanic multi-octave chord out of Wagner or Mahler. The soloist, in his only cadenza, slides sadly and impetuously by turns only to be interrupted by the return of the dance rhythm stamping more insistently than before. The whipped-up frenzy of the orchestra finally overwhelms the soloist, playing *ad lib* very high up in his register with all the fury he can muster before the whole runaway dance comes to a sudden stop.

The concerto doesn't have – since the comparison is invited – Gubaidulina's austere agonies, nor stases of doubt. It is rather another piece full of MacMillan's powerfully expressive virtues, lyrical folk-influenced tunes marshalled away by stronger more dominant rhythms. The soloist keeping up, keeping going against volleying brass and crunching insistent bass rhythms. Not Gubaidulina then, nor yet anything outrageously 'continental'; nevertheless the Russian soloist and conductor (Valery Gergiev) with the London Symphony Orchestra nevertheless combined with great commitment to do Scotland proud.

Robert Stein

Presteigne Festival 2010

With 24 wide-ranging events packed into six days, the 28th Presteigne Festival was one of the busiest and most enjoyable examples yet of this unique annual musical experience, offering considered programming of recent and rarely performed 20th-century repertoire together with a strong emphasis on contemporary composers with traditionalist rather than avant-garde sensibilities and the welcome proliferation of various pre-concert talks and events. Securing Hugh Wood as the 2010 composer-in-residence was a major coup for Presteigne, and his output was well-represented by performances of his Three Pieces for solo piano, op.5, String Quartet No.3, op.20, Piano Trio, op.24 and Clarinet Quintet, op.53.

Festival highlights included John McCabe sharing his diverse musical passions with Michael Berkeley via a series of specially-chosen recordings; a fresh and bracing presentation of Samuel

Barber's rarely encountered *Capricorn Concerto* by the Festival Orchestra under the direction of Artistic Director George Vass; Hugh Wood engaging pithily in an discursive and tangential but always witty and wise conversation with Barrie Gavin; and a moving performance of Nicholas Maw's *Roman Canticle* (a worthy tribute) by mezzo Clare McCaldin, flautist Kathryn Thomas, violist Sarah-Jane Bradley and harpist Suzanne Willison-Kawakec, conducted by Vass. In addition, John McCabe, in one of his last recitals before retiring from public performance, consolidated his reputation as a selfless promoter of fellow composers' works by showcasing Robert Saxton's *Chacony* for piano, left hand, John Casken's *The Haunting Bough* and Emily Howard's *Sky and Water*; he also included a coruscating rendering of his own *Tenebrae*, selected with a view to finding out if he could 'still play it and remain alive at the end' as he put it: thankfully he proved eminently capable of giving a truly memorable account, both passionate and detailed, without fatal consequences.

Foremost among the premières was undoubtedly Hugh Wood's *Beginnings*: Three early songs for mezzo-soprano and string orchestra, op.54. Described by the composer in his programme notes as 'a piece of unfinished business', this was a reworking of a youthful project consisting of fragments of a set of uncommissioned songs dating from the autumn of 1956. The texts are substantial poems – the anonymous 'Tom O'Bedlam's Song', Dylan Thomas's 'Why East Wind Chills' and W. H. Auden's 'O Unicorn among the Cedars'. Like Wood's *Laurie Lee* songs of 1958–59, *Beginnings* is more of a suite than a cycle, linked by a common atmosphere exploring, as Wood put it, 'mystery, magic, innocence, childhood'.

Luxuriating in a post-Wagnerian Romanticism tinged with Expressionist intensity, the songs were lit by the joy of youth and shaped by the cool-headed wisdom of experience. Echoes of the post-war British musical scene were surrounded by more pungent, colouristic harmonies perhaps indicative of a developing creative talent in the 1950s gradually assimilating the music of Schoenberg and his pupils. The overall effect was utterly entrancing: Wood achieved that rare degree of poignancy peculiar to the resolutely unsentimental. Clare McCaldin was a passionate and inventive interpreter of these disparate texts. Her dramatic punching-out of the word 'fists' at the end of the central setting contrasted well with her gorgeous dying fall in the concluding bars of the opening song and the ecstatic, sustained 'Domine' which brought the piece to an emotionally satisfying close. She was expertly accompanied by the strings of the Presteigne Festival Orchestra under the sensitive and alert direction of George Vass.

In his conversation with Barrie Gavin, Wood referred to *Beginnings* as 'old-worldy', and the influence of the English tradition of Bridge and Butterworth was discernible, though the opening setting reminded me more of Britten in its natural illumination of the text. Far more convincing and worthwhile than most of the seemingly inexhaustible examples of very early Britten works which are continually being excavated and reworked, this ravishing and invigorating little collection of songs had the inestimable advantage of being refashioned by the same hand that originally penned them.

Among other first performances, Alexander L'Estrange's *And the Stones Sing* took the form of a 15-minute piece for mezzo-soprano, chorus, percussion and strings. Adey Grummett's text celebrated the 500th anniversary of the 16th-century Presteigne Tapestry in St Andrew's Church depicting Christ's entry into Jerusalem. L'Estrange's settings were direct and simple, written in an unashamedly popular style with something of John Rutter's fervour and clarity. The results were artlessly effective, betraying its composer's reputation as an experienced and skilful arranger of songs. Clare McCaldin, the Joyful Company of Singers and the players of the Festival Orchestra under Vass all contributed to an admirably committed reading.

The Joyful Company of Singers took centre stage in an afternoon concert featuring the Welsh première of Judith Bingham's *Distant Thunder*, a Presteigne Festival co-commission in the form of a short setting of Robert Bridges's poem 'The Evening Darkens Over' that takes the harmonies of Parry's *My Soul There is a Country* and deftly reworks them into a new piece. A companion to other choral re-workings by Bingham – such as *The Darkness is No Darkness*, harmonically derived from S. S. Wesley's 'Thou Wilt Keep Him in Perfect Peace' and *The Drowned Lovers*, which uses Stanford's *The Bluebird* as its model – *Distant Thunder* was a gratifying if all-too-brief reminder of Bingham's instinctive flair for word-setting; I hope the Presteigne Festival will be encouraged to commission more substantial works from her in the future.

Clare McCaldin featured as both narrator and singer, together with flautist Kathryn Thomas (doubling on alto flute and piccolo), violist Sarah-Jane Bradley and harpist Suzanne Willison-Kawalec under Vass's direction in the world première of Stephen McNeff's *A Voice of One Delight*, a 'monologue for voice and chamber ensemble'. Lasting 25 minutes, this ambitious piece is based on poems by Shelley

and the account of his death by the mysterious Jane Williams who he fell in love with during the last months before his death in Italy. McCaldin's strong presence benefitted the work enormously, though the stark juxtaposition of dramatic recital and sung text occasionally served to disrupt rather than enhance the narrative flow. At its most communicative when least striving for effect, *A Voice of One Delight* was crowned by the poignancy of its hushed closing pages with a lyrical solo line dappled by touches of instrumental colour. McNeff is clearly a man of the theatre and some of the inherently dramatic gestures in his new monologue would perhaps have achieved greater clarity if the performance had taken place in a venue able to accommodate comfortably a semi-staging of the work.

A festival is often at its best when involving aspects of the local area. One of the most heartening and forward-looking 2010 Presteigne commissions was *Creating Landscapes*, part of an extensive cross-arts educational project collating composers and visual artists' responses to five places of historical interest in the Border Marches region; the project will also give young people from primary schools in rural Herefordshire and Powys an opportunity to work with performers, artists and composers. Five short wind quintet pieces, written for the Galliard Ensemble, were all based in some way on the attractive Welsh folksong, 'The Blackbird' and highlighted a different instrument. Beginning the collection, Mark Bowden's *the pale hill* took as its starting point the site of the Battle of Bryn Glas at Pilleth in Wales; using a small cell from the folksong as its basis, it lasted twice as long as all the other items and struck me as the least focussed, whilst the ensuing, unexceptional *Stapleton Castle* by Cheryl Frances-Hoad seemed restricted rather than inspired by the project's stipulations. In contrast, Lynne Plowman's suggestion of a local waterfall in *Water-Break-Its-Neck* was subtly evocative and painterly. Cecilia McDowall's *Subject to the Weather*, inspired by Hick's Farm (part of a Methodist co-operative venture in the late 19th century) was exemplary in accommodating several disparate elements into a short piece whilst maintaining the composer's own distinctive voice. It alluded to S. S. Wesley's 'The Church's one foundation' as well as suggesting the 'blackbird' in a freely expressive flute solo leading into a complete rendition of the folksong in its final section. Finally Paul Patterson avoided being hamstrung by the terms of his commission by apparently rejecting them altogether, his jazzy riffs on the Welsh folksong in the concluding *Deep in the Wood* sounding deeply incongruous. Before the world première, which was expertly played by the Galliard Ensemble, George Vass conducted an unscheduled performance of 'The Blackbird' in an arrangement by Cecilia McDowall, in order to illuminate the subsequent 'variations' on the theme. Unless future accounts always include this opening arrangement, or the order of the pieces is altered so that McDowall's *Subject to the Weather* with its full presentation of the folksong begins (or ends) the collection, there is a danger that, in its current form, *Creating Landscapes* will make little sense as a set of variations. In any event, the contributions from Plowman and McDowall (the two composers who sounded as if they had embraced both the conditions and the spirit of the project) would stand up perfectly well on their own as well crafted, vividly imaginative miniatures for wind quintet.

Paul Conway

London, Globe Theatre 2010: 'Kings and Rogues'

'Kings and Rogues', the theme title for Shakespeare's Globe Season 2010, proved to be a winner. There were excellent reviews from the drama critics for Dominic Dromgoole's *Henry IV parts 1 and 2*, with Roger Allam as Falstaff and Jamie Parker (following his memorable role in Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*) as Prince Hal. However Claire van Kampen's music for this six-hour-long stint was apparently planned to be fairly traditional on this occasion, so I turned to other plays on the Globe's menu this time, in search of new scores 'with a difference'. I was naturally drawn to the Globe's new 2010 production of *Macbeth*, after having so much appreciated Claire van Kampen's 'Jazz score for Macbeth' (2001) in the days of Mark Rylance as Artistic Director, with the Globe's modern *Avengers*-style staging with actors in black tie and use of exclusively modern instruments from the musicians gallery above.[11]

For Season 2010, the new score for *Macbeth* was by Orlando Gough, complete with aptly weird and predatory sound effects from a range of acoustic instruments, such as loud bagpipes right at the elbows of the audience in the middle and lower galleries, didgeridoos, and use of elongated pipes with clarinet mouthpieces, which were enough to wake the dead when they suddenly struck up with mournful drone in the gangway, close to where I was sitting in the front row. But yet worse horrors were just in front of us, in this graphic, gory production directed by Lucy Bailey – famed for

[11] See my review in *Tempo* 2002

her 2006 Globe production of *Titus Andronicus*, in which so much rape and pillage and ghoulish horrors were depicted on stage and beyond that the national press was awash with reports of members of the audience fainting (possibly in fact partly due to large emissions of dry ice mistiness and being overshadowed by the black roof 'valerium' above). *Macbeth*'s ghoulish horrors, this year, were relatively close at hand. As leading drama critic Charles Spencer described it 'An elasticated black cloth is stretched from the edge of the stage over the yard, and about 250 groundlings have to stand with their heads poking through holes in it. In this vulnerable position they are goosed by the weird sisters, and confronted with writhing blood-smeared bodies (actors) which suddenly shoot through slits in the cloth right next to them'.[12] I heard no reports of anyone fainting, but then you had to stay constantly alert, to avoid the 'body parts' being thrown from the stage, designed to add further dramatic impact. As the murderous plot unfolded, Orlando Gough's score gave us strange scraping, percussive sound effects and screeches to match, as well as quieter soft whistlings and interludes for reflection, at times.

By complete contrast the setting for Shakespeare's 'late, late play', *Henry VIII* (considered to be a collaboration with John Fletcher) was, to quote the Globe's programme-notes: 'a gorgeous pageant of masques and royal ceremony, a blaze of fireworks, cannon-fire and cloth-of-gold'. In fact it was during the play's first performance in June 1613, that the first Globe Theatre was inadvertently burned to the ground by a blank cannon-shot set off to mark the king's entrance in Act I scene 4.This comes shortly before the Masque where the King, disguised as a shepherd, is charmed by the presence of the Lady Anne Boleyn. The rest, as they say, is history. Composer Nigel Hess, whose attractive music for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* I had enjoyed at the Globe in 2008 (it ran again in a revival for Season 2010), was an ideal choice for the music for Shakespeare's most sumptuous play, *Henry VIII*.

As a reviewer of theatre music, one is used to having to watch out for snippets of incidental music slotted in here and there in the drama, but with Nigel Hess there is music galore throughout. The sweet sound of ensembles of recorders, shawms, lutes etc waft gently from the Musicians' Gallery above the stage, and blasts from natural trumpets abound at crucial points in the drama, with big drum rolls, cymbals and trumpets to mark the entrance of Cardinal Wolsey, for instance. (Fittingly relative silence, however, when later at his downfall Wolsey utters his most famous lines: 'Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my King, He would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies'.) At Anne Boleyn's Coronation, a trumpet voluntary from the Musician's gallery is followed by choirboys and girls from no less than three London choirs, including from the Chapel Royal, processing on stage singing the 'Te Deum'.

Nigel Hess's enormous experience of and deep commitment to providing music for the world of Shakespeare's plays,[13] make it a real joy to be there when his heartfelt new scores enrich Shakespeare at the new Globe Theatre on Bankside, as in Season 2010.

Of the two new plays given their world premières in this season, I decided to concentrate on Howard Brenton's new take on Anne Boleyn, in his play of that title, with music specially composed by William Lyons, one of the Globe's regular composers. Though I recall him tending towards traditional styles, here I felt he was more innovative in his score, with shimmering sound effects around monotones on the bass viols in the musicians' gallery, for instance. I also liked the strange metallic sounds produced by the violinist scraping her bow across what looked like a silver vessel of some kind, similar to the silver goblet on stage used by Anne Boleyn. The use of soft bells, virginal and dulcimer added atmosphere as Anne's more religious side and her interest in Tyndale's new Protestant bible is explored. Could there be yet more material here for TV & film? All of it will need yet more new music to be composed – good for musicians in these recessionary times … .The public never seem to get too much of the Tudors and their appendages.

Jill Barlow

International Pharos Contemporary Music Festival, Cyprus

I hadn't realized how much I missed modernism. In my early concert-going days in London in the late 1970s and early '80s, a new piece was something that required concentration: it was almost certainly going to be serial, uncompromising, 'difficult'; you emerged from the encounter feeling that you had worked for your enlightenment. It took a trip to Cyprus – to the hard-headed delights of the Second International Pharos Contemporary

[12] *Daily Telegraph*, 3 May 2010.

[13] See my review of his *The Food of Love* Suite (Tempo Vol. 64 No. 254, October 2010).

Music Festival – to remind me how little modern concert-life asks of its audiences: new music these days frequently prizes 'accessibility' over content; where once we chewed gristle and bone, we are often now served fruit pastilles.

The principal venue of the Pharos Festival is The Old Shoe Factory in Nicosia, the stunning art-gallery home of the founder and engine of the Pharos Foundation, Garo Keheyan. Nicosia – the world's last divided capital, the Greek Cypriots are quick to point out – is itself a city of striking contrasts: the Green Line, bristling with barbed wire and UN border guards, slashes a no-man's land of decay and rubble across the centre of the town; evident local wealth rubs shoulders with down-at-heel immigrants eking a living in the one part of Europe they're allowed into. The whole place seems to hang on its political divide as if suspended in time. The setting of the Old Shoe Factory encapsulates some of Nicosia's contradictions. At the end of the street, the armed occupants of a guard-post eye you as you pass; behind them stretches the wasteland of the Green Line – but the Old Shoe Factory itself is stunning: marble walls, the crispest modern design, striking contemporary art hangs about you. From the performing area, where the audience is grouped around in semi-circles of chairs and canapés, you look across to a huge glass window, dwarfed in its turn by an enormous palm towering outside; above the piano a tetraptych of woodcuts by Christiane Baumgartner freeze the explosion of a First World War shell, catching terrible power in a micro-second of stasis. The first three concerts of the festival (1–4 September), predicated on the talents of the Kreutzer String Quartet, the pianist Jan Philipp Schulze and clarinettist Roger Heaton, were complemented on the final evening by the Lee K. Dance Company from Korea and the Stockholm-based Kroumata Percussion Ensemble.

The first evening opened by launching the deliberate nonsenses of Kagel's *MM 51* for piano at the audience – in at the shallow end – and continued with the first of the four festival commissions, all to local composers: the unearthly, 16-minute *Paramyth* by Yannis Kyriakides (b. 1969) for violin, clarinet, piano and computer. The vocal part is a recording of a woman in Potami, a village to the west of Nicosia, recounting a Cypriot version of the Bluebeard legend: 'a king […] marries his daughter to Satan, who takes her to his underground castle where she enters the 101st "forbidden" room to find dead bodies and half-eaten carcasses of animals'. The voice is barely trafficked, instead being threaded through the texture like some malevolent spirit. The piece begins slowly, in long-held notes, the instruments often high in their registers, movement and tension gradually building up. Harmonic stasis means the only way for growth is in volume and density, until a bass note, plucked in the piano, provides a point around which the other instruments can toll and swirl, dying away in a long coda. Takemitsu's early *Distance de fée* (1951) for violin and piano, sits midpoint between Debussy and Messiaen, its long lines of extended reflection, interrupted by a much double-stopped central episode, adding up to one of the most sheerly lovely things he ever wrote. Of the other four pieces on this first evening – Kurtág's *Schleedoyer 1 & 2* for quartet (1991), Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for String Quartet* (1914), Birtwistle's Clarinet Quintet (1980) and Xenakis' *Tetras* for string quartet (1983) – the real surprise, despite the kaleidoscopic lyricism of the Birtwistle and the dense passion of the Xenakis, came from the Stravinsky, only four years off its centenary: its radicality hit the ear as if it had been written yesterday.

The next day the age-old continued to startle. Ives's quartet scherzo *Holding Your Own* is 102 years old and his Piano Trio 103 but, as with the Stravinsky, their freshness and cussed individuality pitches them decades further forward. This concert featured two Pharos commissions: *Metioron* by Evis Sammoutis (one of the artistic directors of the festival) and *Metirion* by Andreas Moustoukis (b. 1971). Sammoutis (b. 1979) explained beforehand that, as the commission marked the 50th anniversary of Cypriot independence, and so *Metirion* in ancient Greek means something like 'suspended' or 'hanging in the air', as Cyprus itself still is. The premise of the piece is thus the integration of different blocks of material. Dedicated to Peter Shepperd Skærved, the leader of the Kreuzter Quartet (and the other artistic director of the festival), the 16-minute *Metirion* is scored for clarinet, piano, violin and cello – and in a marvellous aleatory touch, a muezzin, whose call echoed over the Green Zone from the Turkish sector at the start, enhancing Sammoutis' metaphor. It starts with the instruments at the extremes of their registers, making noises rather than music: the clarinet pads and piano pedals clattering and bows rubbing strings, as if searching for an identity. The lines slowly lengthen as the piece gains focus, even admitting a touch of humour, though it can't weaken the intensity, and all four instruments hammer out high notes, the violin and cello grinding on the strings. As the parts align, nervous humour sends the instruments racing up and down their compass. The piano sets up a boogie-woogie pattern over which the others offer excited commentary, not quite in unison.

The music has built up a head of rhythmic energy by now, but it is dispersed in a frenzy of excited runs. A thunderous chord in the bass of the piano silences the excitement and the piece ticks to an uneasy close, dissolving in drooping gestures like a nightclub band running out of steam.

Moustoukis proved to have more personality than his piece. His programme-note confessed that he wasn't sure what he was going to compose by the time of his copy deadline a month earlier, and his piano quartet spent most of its time avoiding ideas. It opened with low drumming on the piano strings and the violin high in its register, the pianist striking a bell chime for additional effect, stirring long-held chords in the strings. The viola eventually has enough of the athematicism and announces the beginning of a melody, heard twice before it disappears. The tension builds up to a climax and the music breaks out into a series of nervous runs. Huge chords in the piano and strings, complemented by the chimes, lead to furiously repeated up-and-down runs, and further insistent chords, as if volume were a substitute for invention. If the piece had a premise, it was the contrast of stasis and action – but he could have tried harder.

The discovery on 3 September was the 12-minute Second String Quartet, *Star Factory*, by the second violin of the Kreutzer Quartet, Mihailo Trandafilovski. It begins with a cello *pizz.* and tremolo from the other strings, from which a chord gradually emerges, and then steps up and starts again, individual lines slowly pushing through the dense textures. What surprised me is that Balkan harmonies – Trandafilovski is Macedonian – somehow began to ring through the unrelieved dissonance, giving it an almost subliminal local colour. The composer later explained that the very roughness of his string-writing reflects the fiddling tradition of his homeland. It's extremely clever – I need to hear the piece again to work out how he does it. The other Kreutzers threaded movements from Jeremy Dale Roberts' *Croquis* for string trio (1980) through the programme, which also offered a stonking account of Berio's *Sequenza VI* for solo viola from Morgan Goff of the Kreutzer Quartet, and Denis Smalley's *Clarinet Threads with CD* (1983), a piece with an elemental swish of energy, Roger Heaton spinning out unending lines around and through the tape sound. And the 13-minute final movement from Jim Aitchison's string quartet *Trajectories of sight & sound* (2006) – inspired by paintings in Tate St Ives and now being heard in another gallery – proved deeply felt, brittle as if wanting to break, tenderly unsure of itself until it works its way to a central climax before dying away to regain the pained composure with which it started. Its interiorized passion reminded me of the slow movements of the late Beethoven quartets; if the first three movements of Aitchison's quartet are as good as this last one, we have a major piece on our hands.

The final concert of the festival took place in an olive grove at Delikipos, 20 kilometres outside Nicosia, where Keheyan intends to establish an arts centre. It's a magical setting. The audience sat on chairs and cushions on a lawn around a swimming pool while the warm night air above them was silently patrolled by a pair of nightjars, sweeping past like urgent ghosts; the Pole Star hung in the heavens over the hills. The first half of the programme was shared by the Kreutzer Quartet and the Lee K. Dance Company, whose movements around (and through) the pool adorned the village-square sounds of Luc Ferrari's tape work *Presque rien No. 1 ou le lever du jour au bord de la mer* (1970). Chance offered an improbable *frisson*: in one exquisite moment, one of the dancers, balanced upside-down on her shoulders, flicked her leg outwards – and a nightjar flew out from behind her, as if from the sole of her foot. The second half of the concert was given over to Kroumata, to close the festival in a riot of rhythm. But the unexpected highlight of the evening – apart from the venue itself – was Ligeti's *Poème Symphonique for 100 Metronomes* (1962): a classic of its kind, of course, but I had never heard it before and was astonished to find how moving something so purely mechanical could be. The premise couldn't be simpler: 100 metronomes, set ticking at the same time, are allowed to wind down in their own time. But as with Antony Gormley's *Field*, the imagination takes over and supplies its own resonances, and so in the Ligeti rhythms appear and vanish, at first sounding as if Nancarrow had taken up change-ringing; and as the energy disperses, a tide of suggestive echoes sweeps past the ears, sometimes recalling a specific piece of music and cumulatively generating a painful sense of loss. It was deeply touching.

The Festival sits squarely on the shoulders of Garo Keheyan, who hosts it, who somehow found the funding for it, who energizes it and its audiences. He may feel at time that he is struggling uphill against institutional indifference, but he has created in the International Pharos Contemporary Music Festival an event that holds up a pennant for contemporary music with a passion that is often missing from better-known occasions. I came away from Nicosia with my ears refreshed and my spirit lifted.

Martin Anderson