

Saturday 15 October 2022
West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge

Pictures at an Exhibition

Elgar: Violin Concerto

Howard: Coalescence

Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition



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Violin Concerto

Anthony Marwood: violin

Interval

Dani Howard

Coalescence

Mussorgsky

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Violin Concerto in B minor, Op 61

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

If you want to know whom I consider to be the greatest living composer, I say without hesitation Elgar. I say this to please no-one; it is my own conviction..... I wish he would write something for the violin. Fritz Kreisler, quoted in the Hereford Times, 7 October 1905

In 1907, two years after the Hereford Times article, Kreisler finally approached Elgar to ask if he would write a violin concerto. Elgar agreed, and it was formally commissioned in 1909 by the Royal Philharmonic Society of London. In composing the solo part, which he envisaged as being technically demanding, Elgar also asked the then leader of the London Symphony Orchestra, Billy Reed, for advice, with Kreisler also making suggestions as the composition went along.

The concerto was premiered on 10 November 1910 with Kreisler as soloist and Elgar conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. It was a great success, with Reed commenting afterwards that 'the concerto proved to be a complete triumph, and the concert a brilliant and unforgettable occasion.' The concerto also became a favourite with the public, and by the end of the 20th century there were more than twenty recordings available, including the famous 1932 recording with the teenage Yehudi Menuhin as soloist. It is also a very personal work that Elgar was himself very fond of, writing to a friend, almost apologetically, 'It's good. Awfully emotional! Too emotional, but I love it.'

The concerto was dedicated to Kreisler, but the score also has a Spanish inscription 'Aquí está encerrada el alma de.....', which translates as 'Herein is enshrined the soul of.....' The five dots constitute something of an Elgarian enigma, and there have been a number of suggestions as to who the five dots might represent. The most likely candidate is Alice Stuart-Wortley, a great friend of Elgar whom he nicknamed 'Windflower'. The fact that Elgar also refers to a key theme of the concerto as 'Windflower' seems to confirm that it was her, but others have suggested that it might have been Helen Weaver, to whom Elgar was briefly engaged in the 1880s, and Elgar's biographer, Jerrold Northrop Moore, went further in suggesting that the reference might be to different people depending on the particular movement. So although Alice remains the prime candidate, it seems that we will never know for sure.

The concerto is set in the standard three movement format, but it is long compared with most other concerti, typically taking around 45-50 minutes

to perform, and is one of the most demanding in the repertoire. The balance of the three movements also represents something of an innovation, with Elgar shifting the main weight of the musical argument to the last movement, unlike the typical 19th century concerto where the last movement would normally be somewhat lighter in character than the others.

The three movements

I. Allegro

The first movement opens with an extended orchestral introduction setting out a group of related themes, the main ones being the opening theme, with its wide leaps up and down the scale, a second theme which Elgar is said to have called 'dejection', and the third, so-called Windflower theme, which is played by a solo clarinet.

When the solo violin enters, it does so by completing the preceding musical line before playing a short solo passage leading into the dejection theme. The violin then takes the music forward, eventually slowing to play the Windflower theme in full. A quicker section follows, which ends with an extended downward scale by the violin, after which the orchestra takes over in a passionate restatement of the two themes. The violin then begins a long, unbroken virtuoso passage until the movement is finally brought to a close with two sforzando chords.

II. Andante

The second movement, though more understated than the opening movement, is no less intense, with undertones of sadness as indicated by Elgar's use of Wagner's so-called 'Tristan chord', a musical shorthand for tragic love. The orchestra opens the movement, with the violin entering with a beautiful, impassioned theme – music that Elgar later said that he would like to have inscribed on his tombstone. The violin then leads the music forward in a long reverie, violin and orchestra finally joining to bring the movement to a peaceful close.

III. Allegro molto

The last movement starts with a single, quick bar from the orchestra before the solo violin sets off on a whirl of notes, followed by the orchestra playing a march-like theme. The sequence repeats, after which the violin takes up the marching theme itself, and then, after a further contribution by the violin, the orchestra retrieves the theme in a final restatement. The violin then continues its journey before playing a second theme, after which there are references to the themes from the first two movements as the violin continues its virtuoso display.

Eventually we reach another of Elgar's innovations, the long cadenza, marked *Lento*, which is written as part of the musical line rather than simply as a showpiece for the violin. Elgar also has the orchestra maintain an accompaniment throughout, with the strings being instructed to play a 'thrummed' pizzicato using the soft part of the fingers. After the cadenza is completed, the run of notes and the marching theme are repeated, and the music moves into its final phase, ending with flourishes from the violin and three concluding orchestral chords.

Chris Fisher

Interval

Coalescence

Dani Howard (b 1993)

Dani Howard, who is originally from Hong Kong, is an English composer who already has a large number of orchestral and other works to her name, and is rapidly gaining worldwide recognition. An example of the kind of reception her work is receiving can be seen from the reaction to her first opera, *Robin Hood*, which was premiered in 2019, and was described on the classical music website Bachtrack as 'a sophisticated and incredibly beautiful piece that surely places Howard amongst the best of contemporary British opera composers.'

Coalescence, which also dates from 2019, is an orchestral piece which was commissioned by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society to open their 2019/20 season, and was given its premiere by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic on 19 September 2019. In her programme notes for the premiere Dani Howard describes the work as follows:

'Coalescence explores the concept of humans versus nature, and how over the centuries I feel our species has attempted to 'outsmart' nature in many ways. It was originally inspired after walking past an enormous tree, that evidently over the decades had grown in and around a solid metal railing that had been built into the pavement in central London. The piece features real church bells, which signify the warning signs given to us by nature, and the work explores humans ignoring these warnings (with short brass interjections representing humans being both ignorant and resistant to accepting our climate crisis). There is a playful-like dialogue between the two, and almost like a game, the different elements bounce off each other in both playful and serious ways.'

The work is scored for orchestra with triple wind and harp and includes an extended percussion section. It is quite short, lasting about twelve minutes.

The opening, marked 'Bold' in the score, moves forward at a brisk pace until, just short of two minutes into the piece, in a passage marked 'Intimate', there is an extended pastoral section featuring flutes and piccolo and a solo string quartet. The music then continues through various interplays as described by Howard, with sections given headings such as 'Expressive' and 'Devising a Plan' until, eventually, in a section headed 'Grand', the pace quickens and the piece comes to a hopeful conclusion to the issues explored in the earlier sections.

Pictures at an Exhibition

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)

Pictures at an Exhibition was composed in June 1874 as a tribute to the artist Viktor Hartmann, a close friend of Mussorgsky, who died suddenly in August 1873 at the age of only 39. Mussorgsky dedicated the new work to the critic Vladimir Stasov, who was a supporter of both Mussorgsky and Hartmann, and had introduced them to each other in the late 1860s. Stasov had also helped to organise a memorial exhibition of Hartmann's work in St Petersburg in February and March 1874, and it was this that led to Mussorgsky deciding to commemorate Hartmann by portraying the exhibition in music. Written originally as a piano suite, it describes a walk past a series of Hartmann paintings in the exhibition, each of which is portrayed in the music, together with a recurring 'promenade' theme describing the walk from painting to painting.

Mussorgsky's commitment to the work is evident from a letter he wrote to Stasov during its composition, in which he says: 'Hartmann is boiling as Boris* boiled – sounds and ideas hung in the air, I am gulping and overeating, and can barely manage to scribble them on paper.' But whereas Mussorgsky devotees were enthusiastic about the new work, others, including his fellow composers, were much less convinced and Mussorgsky set the work aside without making any attempt to have it published.

In 1886, five years after Mussorgsky's death, the piano suite was finally published in a version produced by Rimsky-Korsakov. However this turned out to be not entirely accurate, and it was not until 1931, the 50th anniversary of the composer's death, that a corrected version finally appeared. In the meantime various orchestral transcriptions had been written, including one written by Ravel in 1922 that soon became adopted as the definitive orchestral version of the work. It is the one that is now generally performed and is the version that is being performed tonight.

* A reference to Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*, which was premiered on 27 January 1874

The orchestral version and the individual pictures

There are ten pictures portrayed in the music, although in the case of one, *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle*, it is thought that there may have actually been two separate pictures. Also, only a few of the pictures described in the music are known with certainty to have survived. Fortunately we are helped by the fact that Stasov, who would have had direct knowledge of the exhibition, added his own comments to the first *promenade* and to each of the musical portraits, and these are included in italics in the list below.

Promenade I – *In this piece Mussorgsky depicts himself roving through the exhibition, now leisurely, now briskly, in order to come close to a picture that had attracted his attention and, at times sadly, thinking of his departed friend.*

This is the famous promenade theme, introduced here by the brass. It will recur later, and also appears in the final movement, The Great Gate of Kyiv, as the work is brought to a conclusion.

Picture I. *Gnomus – A sketch depicting a little gnome, clumsily running with crooked legs.*

Hartmann's sketch, now lost, is said to have depicted a toy gnome, and the music brings him to life as it follows his lurching, ungainly movements.

Promenade II

This second *promenade* has the same alternating rhythm as the first, but by contrast is quiet and restrained, as if the viewer is lost in thought.

Picture II. *The old castle – A medieval castle before which a troubadour sings a song.*

This depicts a watercolour by Hartmann of an Italian medieval castle. Marked *Andante molto cantabile e con dolore*, it is a slow, contemplative movement with the main melodic themes played by the bassoon and alto saxophone, supported by an insistent, dotted rhythm in the strings.

Promenade III

There follows a brief version of the *promenade* which leads straight into the next movement.

Picture III. *Tuileries – An avenue in the garden of the Tuileries, with a swarm of children and nurses.*

Tuileries depicts a picture, now lost, of the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris. It is a short, lively movement, reflecting the innocence of the children as they play.

Picture IV. *Bydlo* – A Polish cart on enormous wheels, drawn by oxen.

The Polish word 'bydło' means, literally, cattle, but also came to mean the poor and uneducated, and is used here in that sense, describing the occupants of the cart and the way their heavy load is being driven along the road. The music perfectly reflects the cart's slow progress as it approaches, the music getting louder with the thumping of the oxen's feet being heard as it passes. The music then quietens and dies away as the cart moves off into the distance.

Promenade IV

There follows a further, reflective version of the *promenade*, marked *Tranquillo* and set in the minor key.

Picture V. *Ballet of the unhatched chicks* – Hartmann's design for the décor of a picturesque scene in the ballet *Trilby*.

Trilby was a ballet produced by the Bolshoi in St Petersburg in 1871 with décor by Hartmann, and in this movement Mussorgsky is describing a painting by Hartmann of dancers from the ballet dressed as fledgling canaries emerging from their shells. The music is fast and urgent, reflecting the urgency of the chicks as they peck at the shells and finally escape into the world outside.

Picture VI. *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle* – Two Jews: rich and poor.

This is thought to represent a pair of paintings, one representing the rich Jew and the other the poor one. The movement is written in four short sections – a slow passage, played on the strings, representing Samuel Goldenberg, a quicker section featuring woodwind, representing Schmuyle, a third section with the two previous sections together in counterpoint and, finally, a brief coda.

Picture VII. *The Marketplace in Limoges* – French women quarrelling violently in the market.

This takes the form of a lively *Scherzo* in 4/4 time, depicting the to-ing and fro-ing of the quarrelling women. It ends with a *fortissimo* coda leading directly into the next movement.

Picture VIII. *The Catacombs/With the dead in a dead language* – Hartmann represented himself examining the Paris catacombs by the light of a lantern.

This movement is set in two sections, reflecting the two headings. The first, marked *Largo*, consists of a series of melancholic chords, some loud and some soft, as Hartmann looks into the dark of the catacombs. This is then followed by the second, gloomy section as Hartmann contemplates the rows of the dead.

Picture IX. The hut on fowls' legs – Hartmann's drawing depicted a clock in the form of Baba Yaga's hut on fowls' legs. Mussorgsky added the witch's flight in a mortar.

Two *fortissimo* chords announce the beginning of the next movement. Baba Yaga is a figure from Slavic folklore, described as: 'an ogress who steals, cooks, and eats her victims, usually children. She lives with two or three sisters in a forest hut that spins continually on birds' legs. Baba Yaga can ride through the air in an iron kettle or in a mortar that she drives with a pestle, creating tempests as she goes.'

The movement takes the form of a *scherzo* and *trio*, with two *Allegro* sections framing a central *Andante*. It has been seen as mirroring the grotesque Gnomus of the first picture, but on a much bigger scale, with the music giving the feel of a headlong chase as Baba Yaga looks for another victim. The movement ends with a brief coda leading directly into the last movement.

Picture X. The Great Gate of Kyiv – Hartmann's sketch was his design for city gates at Kyiv in the ancient Russian massive style with a cupola shaped like a Slavonic helmet.

This is the longest and best known of the movements. It opens with a majestic statement of the main theme, reflecting the mighty appearance of the gate, followed by a peaceful second theme based on a Russian orthodox chant. A series of scales then heralds a repeat of the main theme, followed by what is a shortened version of the second theme. There is then an interlude in which the promenade is recalled amidst the sounds of clockwork and bells. The main theme then returns and a short coda brings the work to a conclusion.

Chris Fisher

Anthony Marwood (violin)

Photo: Pia Johnson



Anthony Marwood enjoys a wide-ranging international career as soloist, director and chamber musician. Recent solo engagements include performances with the Boston Symphony, St Louis Symphony, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, New World Symphony, London Philharmonic, National Orchestra of Spain, Adelaide Symphony and Sydney Symphony. He has worked with conductors such as Valery Gergiev, Sir Andrew Davis, Thomas Søndergård, David Robertson, Gerard Korsten, Ilan Volkov, Jaime Martin and Douglas Boyd. Highlights in 2021 included his debut at the Tanglewood Festival in the USA, playing Ligeti's violin concerto,

conducted by Thomas Adès. Further engagements are with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, National Orchestra of Spain, Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, Trondheim Soloists, Les Violons du Roy in Canada and the Adelaide Symphony, as well as performing at the Yellow Barn, Portland and Bridgehampton Festivals in the USA, and Ilumina Festival in Brazil. Many leading composers have written concertos for him, including Thomas Adès, Steven Mackey, Sally Beamish and Samuel Carl Adams.

Anthony is a prolific recording artist, and has recorded 50 CDs for the Hyperion label, alongside many recordings for other labels. His next project is to record Elgar's violin concerto.

He was the violinist of the Florestan Trio for sixteen years and won the Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist Award in 2006. In April 2022 he returned to the International Musicians' Seminar at Prussia Cove, Cornwall to teach a week of masterclasses.

Anthony, who resides in Sussex and Amsterdam, is co-Artistic Director of the Peasmarsh Chamber Music Festival in East Sussex, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2018. As a chamber musician he has a wide circle of regular collaborators including Steven Isserlis, Aleksandar Madžar, Inon Barnatan, Alexander Melnikov, Denes Varjon and James Crabb.

Harry Sever (conductor)



BBC Music Magazine ‘Rising Star’ conductor Harry Sever studied at Oxford University and trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Academy of Music. Recent and upcoming engagements include *Siegfried* (Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester/Den Ny Opera), *The Fairy Queen* (Longborough), *Carmen* (Opera North), *Fantasio* (Garsington), *La Traviata* (Opera Holland Park), *Cendrillon* (Bampton Classical Opera), *The Nutcracker* (Peter Schaufuss Ballet), as well as concerts with the orchestra of Welsh National Opera,

recordings with Opera North, and projects with The Royal Danish Opera, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Trinity Laban and British Youth Opera.

Harry is currently Longborough Festival Opera’s Ring Cycle Conducting Fellow, conducting performances of *Siegfried* and *Die Walküre*, and working towards their *Ring Cycle* in 2024. A finalist in both the LSO’s Donatella Flick and Athens International Conducting Competitions, he has worked on the music staff at ENO, Den Jyske Opera, and the Grange Festival, collaborating with orchestras including the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Odense Symfoniorkester, and the Britten Sinfonia, and has performed at the Royal Albert Hall, Royal Festival Hall and the Barbican.

Harry’s recent composition highlights include commissions for the Oxford Lieder Festival and Wigmore Hall, and his musicals *James and the Giant Peach*, *Guess How Much I Love You*, and *Mr Men & Little Miss* have toured internationally with Sell-A-Door Productions. Other theatre scores include *The Kreutzer Sonata* (Arcola Theatre), *Sleeping Beauty* and *My Mother Said I Never Should* (The Theatre Chipping Norton), *King Lear*, *As You Like It*, and *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (The Minack Theatre). For the screen, credits include *Stalker* (CBS), and for radio, *Rossum’s Universal Robots* for BBC Radio 4.

Passionate about outreach work, he is a regular collaborator with the Royal Opera House, ENO and Streetwise Opera, bringing music to the wider community.

Phillip Granell (guest leader)



Phillip is a versatile violinist, performer, and string arranger based in London, committed to creating across the musical spectrum.

He leads and directs Phaedra Ensemble, a collective built around a string quartet with a focus on new music and creative collaboration.

2023 sees the release of their debut album, featuring major works by Meredith Monk, released on ECM records.

As an ensemble musician, he has performed and recorded with The Ulster Orchestra, London Contemporary Orchestra, Aurora Orchestra, The Riot Ensemble, Britten Sinfonia, Heritage Orchestra, English National Ballet, London Concert Orchestra, National

Symphony Orchestra, and with Welsh National Opera as guest leader for the 2019 UK theatre tour of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*.

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Talitha Kearey
John Richards
Nichola Roe
Marian Holness
Ariane Stoop
Sarah Ridley
Joyce Yu

Violin 2

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Emma Lawrence
Hilary Crooks
Abigail Tan
Margaret Scourse
Roz Chalmers
David Favara
Halyna Vakulenko
Amelie Roper
Maydo Kay

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Ruth Donnelly
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Susan Sparrow
Tony Scholl
Alan Blackwell

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Samantha Martin

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Rachael Dunlop
Katy Shorttle
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Cor Anglais

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Clarinet

Graham Dolby
David Hayton
Sue Pettitt

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Colin Bloch
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