

# Quarternotes

## Turnage Coraline takes the stage

*After a sell-out run by The Royal Opera in London, Mark-Anthony Turnage's new opera for family audiences travels on to Freiburg, Lille, Stockholm and Melbourne.*

Neil Gaiman's dark fantasy *Coraline* has found a successful new guise as an opera for family audiences, composed by Mark-Anthony Turnage to a libretto by Rory Mullarkey. The Royal Opera's staging in March at the Barbican Theatre, conducted by Sian Edwards, attracted capacity audiences and is set to travel to Theater Freiburg this month, Opéra de Lille in November, and Folkoperan (Stockholm) and Victorian Opera (Melbourne) in future seasons, performed with German, French and Swedish singing translations.

Turnage was drawn to Neil Gaiman's novella because of its imagination, mystery and lively characterisation: "The idea of a seductive alternative reality that is increasingly scary is very interesting psychologically, allowing me to explore situations, ideas and emotions through my music. Also, crucially, this is an important story in having a female lead – for me *Coraline* is a fantastic role model."

"Terrific performances and special effects ensure children in the audience love Mark-Anthony Turnage's take on the cult novella... *Coraline*'s exploration of her parents' new home takes her into a parallel world beyond a bricked-up doorway in her parents' drawing room. The Other World seemingly offers limitless comfort and enjoyment, but its inhabitants mysteriously have buttons sewn over their eyes, and it soon becomes apparent that the love offered

by *Coraline*'s Other Mother and Father is sinister in its controlling possessiveness." *The Guardian*

"The question for the composer is how dark to go. Using just 16 musicians, Turnage finds endless resource, especially in his ever piquant combinations of wind instruments. He is good at catching the busyness of humdrum suburban life in music that is entertainingly frothy, and there are some spooky sounds emanating from the other world beyond... In bringing it to life, The Royal Opera has not put a foot wrong... Aletta Collins, the director, has delivered on all the story's creepy special effects. The runaway hand in the final scene gets a gasp of delighted horror." *Financial Times*

**"Turnage's opera captures the spooky essence of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*..."**

*The Observer*

"Young and old alike were gripped every which way by Mark-Anthony Turnage's vivid fairy-tale opera... Numerous accompanied children were present when I attended, but plenty of unaccompanied adults too... a real, moment-by-moment engagement with characters and drama... There's more than a tincture of middle-period Stravinsky in Turnage's writing. But the reminiscences (superbly off-beam chording) are



Photo: Royal Opera House/Stephen Cunniffe

marvellous in their way... an extremely skilful score." *Sunday Times*

In addition to international performances of *Coraline*, next season brings a new production of *Anna Nicole* in Nuremberg. The world premiere

of Turnage's *Testament* for soprano and orchestra, setting Ukrainian poetry by Taras Shevchenko, is conducted by Kiril Karabits in November with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, travelling on the following month for performances by the Staatskapelle Weimar.

## Kashperova Russian returns



Boosey & Hawkes has announced the publishing of works by the forgotten Russian composer Leokadiya Kashperova (1872–1940). Known to date only as Stravinsky's piano teacher in St Petersburg, Kashperova is being reappraised as a composer, including her *Symphony in B minor* which was broadcast by the BBC for the first time on International Women's Day in March.

Known primarily as a pedagogue and pianist, Leokadiya Kashperova was also active in St Petersburg as a composer of Romantic songs, chamber music and symphonic works. She had studied composition with Nikolay Solovyov and piano with Anton Rubinstein and was a favoured interpreter of virtuosic new works by Glazunov and her friend Balakirev. She travelled internationally, playing twice at London's Aeolian Hall in 1907, where she attracted positive reviews, as well as performing her own piano concerto in Berlin.

Kashperova's compositions have come to light thanks to the scholarly endeavours of Dr Graham Griffiths, whose book *Stravinsky's Piano: Genesis of a Musical Language* (CUP, 2013) explores the creative impact of Kashperova's teaching upon her piano pupil, Igor Stravinsky. Stravinsky's generally disparaging remarks about his piano teacher led Dr Griffiths to question the teacher-student relationship, revealing that Kashperova was in fact a highly talented and successful pianist-composer. Her career fell foul of politics when she married an exiled Bolshevik revolutionary and they were forced to flee Petrograd in the wake of the Russian Revolution.

Music planned for the new publishing programme includes Kashperova's *Symphony in B minor* (1905), two substantial cello sonatas and a selection of piano works, song cycles and choral works.



This summer accelerates the festivities for the Leonard Bernstein centennial, with the birthday itself celebrated on 25 August. American events are led by the Tanglewood Festival, which had such a close relationship with the composer and conductor across half a century, from the time he attended the inaugural 1940 class as a protégé of Serge Koussevitzky to his final concerts in 1990 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra.

The birthday celebration sees a host of conducting talent sharing the Tanglewood podium including Andris Nelsons, Christoph Eschenbach, Keith Lockhart, Michael Tilson Thomas and John Williams, with performers including Audra McDonald, Midori, Yo-Yo Ma, Susan Graham and Thomas Hampson. In addition the Boston Symphony Orchestra will be augmented by players from numerous orchestras around the world with which Bernstein maintained close associations.

In Europe, Bernstein is the most performed composer at the BBC Proms with eight major works including *On the Town* with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by John Wilson on the birthday itself. Other highlights include two concert performances of *West Side Story* with the John Wilson Orchestra, Antonio Pappano conducting *Symphony No. 1: Jeremiah* with the Santa Cecilia Orchestra and Marin Alsop conducting *Symphony No. 2: The Age of Anxiety* with the Baltimore Symphony and pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

25 August is also a celebration day at the Grafenegg Festival in Austria, with a Bernstein Hommage concert featuring the Tonkünstler Orchestra conducted by Yutaka Sado providing a survey of the composer's oeuvre. Australia's birthday tribute is provided by the Queensland Orchestra in Brisbane with an all-Bernstein programme conducted by Alondra de la Parra.

Other summer festivals with Bernstein highlights include those most closely associated with the maestro. The Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival presents The Big Bernstein concert and a recreation of Bernstein's momentous 1989 performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* following the fall of the Berlin wall. The Pacific Music Festival celebrates the centennial of its founder in July with an all-Bernstein programme and *Halil* conducted by Valery Gergiev in Sapporo, Hiroshima and Tokyo.

**"Music can name the unnameable and communicate the unknowable."** *Leonard Bernstein*

Bernstein at 100 programming continues into the 2018/19 season with events including a new staging by Barry Kosky of *Candide* at the Komische Oper in Berlin – in the Royal National Theatre version – and concert performances by the London Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop and by the Seoul Philharmonic. An intriguing site specific concert will see *Chichester Psalms* return to Chichester Cathedral in the UK on 24 November, part of the city's extended tribute to Bernstein.

This month sees the publication of *Famous Father Girl*, the new 'memoir of growing up Bernstein' by the composer/conductor's eldest daughter Jamie (Harper Collins 0062641352). The broadcaster and filmmaker mines the emotional depths of her childhood and invites us into her family's private world.

For full details of centennial events visit [leonardbernstein.com/at100](http://leonardbernstein.com/at100).



2019 is the bicentenary of the birth of Jacques Offenbach and the year also celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Offenbach Edition Keck (OEK), published by Boosey & Hawkes, which has done so much to expand the performed repertoire by the composer with award-winning editions.

The research by Jean-Christophe Keck, widely regarded as the world's leading expert on Offenbach's music, has seen many forgotten stageworks and orchestral scores performed anew, and this is set to continue in the run-up to 2019.

Two years after the success of *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Offenbach composed the three-act opéra-bouffe *Barkouf* to a libretto by Scribe and Boisseaux. This bitter-sweet satire, with a dog in the lead role, receives its first performance using the new OEK edition in December at the Opéra national du Rhin. The autumn also sees a new production of *Le Roi Carotte* at the Staatsoper Hannover following its successful Lyon revival in 2015, the first French staging of *Les Fées du Rhin* in Tours, and further performances of Stefan Herheim's recent production of *Barbe-Bleu* at the Komische Oper in Berlin.

For full information visit [www.offenbach-edition.de](http://www.offenbach-edition.de).

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# Dean Cello Concerto unveiled

Brett Dean introduces his new concerto for cellist Alban Gerhardt, with first performances over the coming months in Sydney, Berlin and Amsterdam.

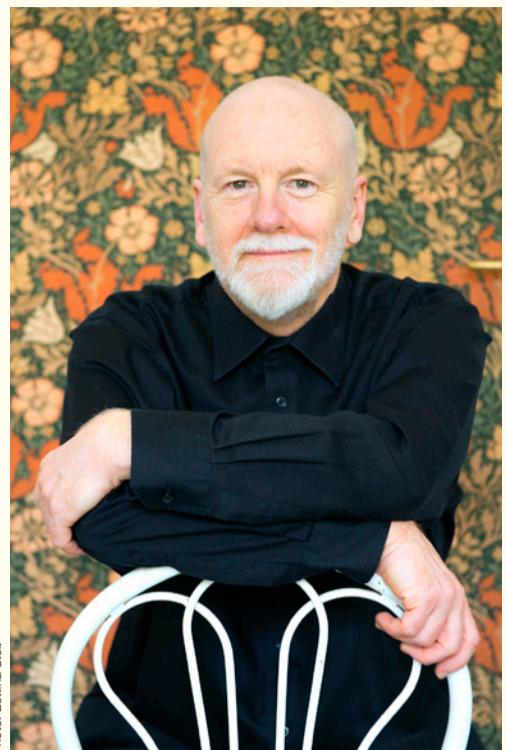


Photo: Bettina Stöckel

You've had a number of requests to write a cello concerto over the past decade. What made the time right now?

The number of cellists that have approached me is an indication of their hunger for new repertoire, partly a result of there being fewer available

concertos for the instrument. After the *Viola Concerto* and *The Lost Art of Letter Writing* for violin and orchestra, it seemed natural I'd write a *Cello Concerto*. And it was fitting it should be for Alban Gerhardt, as he has always been part of my 'musical family' – I knew his father who played in the Berlin Philharmonic and his sister Manon, also a violist, and have played chamber music with Alban for many years including recent string quintet tours.

*How did the experience of playing alongside Alban Gerhardt have an effect on the writing of the concerto?*

As well as admiration for him as a musician I've also been impressed by his whole approach to championing contemporary works. He has an amazing ability to internalise the music which goes way beyond memorising new scores – a feat in itself. I've seen him perform concertos by Matthias Pintscher and Unsuk Chin and he treats them with the same respect and enthusiasm as the standard repertoire of Dvořák and Elgar. When I wrote *Eleven Oblique Strategies* for the Feuermann cello competition in 2014, Alban agreed to test it and we discussed technical issues for the instrument. That solo cello work turned out to be an important source for the concerto, and I've tried to make the challenges similarly stretching but ultimately attainable.

*What influence does your being a string player have on writing for the cello?*

As a violist, writing for strings has always seemed like a 'home' rather than an 'away' game for me.

It's familiar ground but there are also dangers to avoid, such as knowing what will be difficult to play which could either inhibit or over-excite! And most importantly I have to be careful that any knowledge of the vast string repertoire doesn't limit my fantasy as a composer. From a viola perspective, the cello is a much bigger instrument in all senses, not only its dimensions but also the magnificent rich sound it can produce in most registers, which creates yet also concurrently quells a certain 'violist's envy'!

*Do you see the concerto as a dramatic form?*

I certainly do. This is outwardly, even overtly the case in a number of my concertos, where the individual battles against the masses, for instance in my clarinet concerto *Ariel's Music*, inspired by a woman's fight to raise awareness about the AIDS epidemic, or in my trumpet concerto *Dramatis Personae* where the soloist acts out different heroic roles. The *Cello Concerto* is at the opposite extreme in that it is more concerned with collaboration than conflict, with ideas from the soloist being amplified by the orchestra. The *Viola Concerto* sits somewhere between, as there is no overt programme but rather what Birtwistle might describe as a 'secret theatre', some of which is confrontational in nature and some of it collaborative.

*Some of your concertos are titled 'concerto' while others have descriptive titles. How do you decide?*

Choosing the title is important and this is linked to the nature of the work itself, usually from inception. With *Dramatis Personae* the soloist's theatrical role was central to the work, so it was never going to be just a *Trumpet Concerto*. The premise of the new work is concerned with music for music's sake so *Cello Concerto*, pure and simple, seems exactly the right title.

*What are the shape and soundworld of the concerto?*

It's cast in a single movement and, while there are discernible sections, it flows uninterruptedly across a 25-minute span. As a middle register instrument within the orchestral space, the cello has to be treated sensitively, with judicious care in what you can throw against it in terms of orchestral accompaniment and partnering. The scoring is pretty standard with my usual expanded percussion section including some unconventional elements. The standout addition is my first use of a Hammond organ which responds to those sections of the piece with a jazz funk flavour. It is sometimes used chordally but more often has a busy part with a dark, edgy groove. I'm intrigued to hear how it sounds at the premiere!

**Dean**

**Cello Concerto** (2018) 25'

Commissioned by Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Berliner Philharmoniker, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Amsterdam Cello Biennale, Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ

**Performances with  
Alban Gerhardt including:**

22/25 August 2018 (world premiere)

Opera House, Sydney  
Sydney Symphony Orchestra/  
David Robertson

4-6 October 2018 (European premiere)  
Philharmonie, Berlin  
Berliner Philharmoniker/Sakari Oramo

25 October 2018 (Dutch premiere)  
Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, Amsterdam  
Antwerp Symphony Orchestra/  
Klaus Mäkelä (Cello Biennale Amsterdam)



Photo: Kaija Kikkas

## Bernstein A Quiet Place revisited

Leonard Bernstein's centennial year has brought a successful new production of his opera *A Quiet Place* to Vienna and Budapest. This deeply personal score with a libretto by the composer and Stephen Wadsworth was Bernstein's last stagework, revolving around a family grappling with communication in the wake of a funeral. The Neue Oper Wien staging by Phillip M. Krenn opened at the Wiener Kammeroper in March with Walter Kobera in the pit, travelling on to the Müpa in Budapest as a highlight of the city's Spring Festival.

The new staging employed Garth Edwin Sunderland's 2013 adaptation of the opera, with small orchestra, already heard in Berlin, Dortmund, Dresden and Montreal conducted by Kent Nagano. While the original full version remains definitive, with the complexity of Bernstein's later style surrounding his earlier jazzy one-act opera *Trouble in Tahiti*, the smaller version employing a reduced chamber orchestration offers an alternative, more intimate experience. *Trouble in Tahiti* is removed and some fine music is restored, including full arias for Sam and François.

"A strong evening with an excellent cast ... Bernstein moulds the text into a ductile *parlando*, comments on and interprets the dialogues in the orchestra – and there

is one thing he can do above all: transform complex feelings into melodies that sometimes wind around in free tonality, sometimes sound blues-like, or follow other patterns. The epilogue of the first act consolidates into a touching baring of souls."

*Die Presse*

"The music of this psycho-hell begins as a bustling-agitated conversation piece. Many mourners verbosely and snappishly conceal their innermost selves. Leonard Bernstein ensnares the funeral party orchestrally with a nervous stylistic mix of classic modernity. However, its angular stop-and-go play subsides gradually, according its place to a gentler, partly songlike pace..."

*Der Standard*

"Bernstein, a melting-pot composer with a propensity for dodecaphony and Mahler, for jazz and musical pathos, once again pulls out all the stops of his art... for Bernstein's hundredth birthday *A Quiet Place* presents itself in magnificent form." *Wiener Zeitung*

A further production of *A Quiet Place* is staged by Opera Zuid in November, touring to 12 cities in the Netherlands in the full version including *Trouble in Tahiti*. This version can be heard in the composer's recording of the 1986 Vienna staging, recently reissued as part of the new Complete Works box from Deutsche Grammophon.



Bernstein's *A Quiet Place*, staged by Neue Oper Wien at the Wiener Kammeroper.

## Britten Gloriana staged in Madrid

The Teatro Real in Madrid won praise in April for its new production of Britten's opera *Gloriana*, directed by David McVicar. This was the first major staging of the work since the Britten Centenary in 2013, and the production is set to travel on to English National Opera and Flemish Opera in future seasons. *Gloriana's* opening night acted as prelude to the first World Opera Forum, where discussions inevitably focused on ways to refresh the repertoire. As *Operawire* noted, the Teatro Real led "a charge at bringing the opera back to the forefront... And it was a sensation."

"All the protagonists in Britten's theatrical world are bearers of a stigma and, in that sense, the character of Elizabeth I does not escape the norm: her sin, her curse, is power. The parable of *Gloriana* is, in the final analysis, the solitude of power... The music is top quality, the composer reconstructing the Elizabethan setting without resorting to stylistic pastiche." *ABC*

"Britten, with his unparalleled dramatic genius, knew how to create a constant transfer between the twin worlds of the Renaissance and the modern, alternating occasional music (ceremonial, courtesan) and dramatic music, archaic music and modern music, external music and intimate music, harmony and discord, using resources



Photo: Teatro Real/Javier del Real  
*Britten's Gloriana in David McVicar's new production at the Teatro Real in Madrid.*

already learned and tested in *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd* to reinforce the dramaturgy..." *El País*

*Gloriana* was the second in a planned series of Britten productions at the Teatro Real conducted by Music Director Ivor Bolton. It followed the success of Deborah Warner's *Billy Budd* last season, in an award-winning staging shared with the Opéra national de Paris, Opera di Roma, Finnish National Opera and The Royal Opera in London.

## Shepherd Express Abstractionism



Sean Shepherd's new orchestral work, *Express Abstractionism*, is a punning response to one of the 20th century's greatest artistic movements. Premiered in February by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Andris Nelsons, the work receives its first European performance with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra on 31 August, again with Nelsons at the helm. The two orchestras have gone beyond a shared music director, planning exchange visits, co-commissioning and joint programming strands across a five-year collaboration.

The first of the Boston-Leipzig commissions, Shepherd's 13-minute work draws inspiration from five visual artists and their artwork: Alexander

Calder, Gerhard Richter, Wassily Kandinsky, Lee Krasner and Piet Mondrian. Observing how these artists presented and layered different ideas in raw forms on a canvas, the composer similarly organised the ideas in his orchestral work. Each of the four movements also focuses on natural phenomena: dense bubbles or the origin of life on earth, the rainbow inside a bolt of lightning, marble, and the sun or moon.

"In the first movement, calling on the work of Alexander Calder, one could hear the airiness and perspective shifts of a turning mobile, combined with the mechanical grind of its moving parts. Minuscule negative spaces aerated the burly second movement... The dark trombone hum conversing with the luminescence of high winds in the final movement was stunning... a vital taste of the future." *Boston Globe*

"...an attractive and colorful musical canvas... the work moves from searching calm to blazing intensity... Strings shimmer, wood blocks and drums rumble, and cooing English horn lines rise to the surface before dying away... Shepherd's music effectively builds from gestural phrases to powerful climactic moments." *Boston Classical Review*

Next month sees the premiere of Shepherd's new orchestral work *Melt* at the Grand Teton Music Festival conducted by Donald Runnicles followed by a performance at the Cabrillo Festival in August under Cristian Măcelaru.

## MacMillan Saxophone Concerto



James MacMillan's compact new concerto for Australian soprano saxophonist Amy Dickson was premiered by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Joseph Swensen in April. The Australian premiere follows on 17 August with Dickson and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra conducted by Nicholas Carter, and the London premiere will be presented by the Aurora Orchestra in a future season.

**“...a very popular addition to the repertoire...”**

*Glasgow Herald*

Though MacMillan has written for saxophone before, this was his first concerto for the instrument, taking it into unusual geographical territory with the folk-inspired material. The 15-minute *Saxophone Concerto* is among the composer's most distinctively Scottish works of recent years, as described by *The Scotsman*, “transforming and subverting seemingly innocuous Scottish traditional music forms – a strathspey, a reel and a jig, plus rich heterophony nodding to Gaelic psalm singing.”

“The three-movement piece is a fantasy on traditional Scottish dances... but that doesn't begin to describe the

tensions and ambiguities of this absorbing piece. The first movement, for instance, has the macabre, driven relentlessness of Shostakovich or Prokofiev at their most sardonic... The middle movement does indeed provide repose and relief: the soloist as cantor, the strings as congregation, picking up on her Gaelic-tinged contours... With the finale, however, we are back in the land of enigma... with the saxophone freewheeling giddily over a jig... Yet the ending is left hanging in the air, strange, dislocated, dissonant and unresolved – as if the pure joy of the ceilidh has dissipated in the harsh light of dawn.” *The Times*

“...a remarkably concentrated, punchy, pungent piece, with extraordinarily inventive, piquant writing for his string orchestra... Dickson gave a beautifully nuanced account, full of subtle luscious colours, not least in the keening lines of the slow movement.” *The Scotsman*

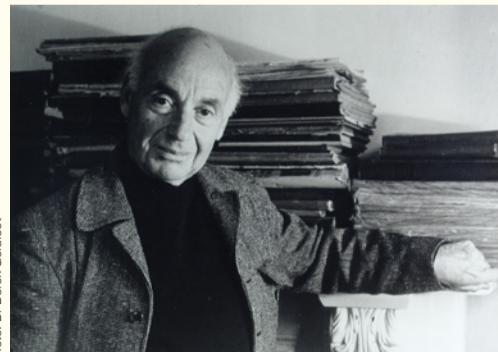
April also saw a historic performance of MacMillan's *Stabat Mater* in the Vatican, the first work to be live streamed from the Sistine Chapel, providing a powerful musical and visual experience. The 55-minute work for choir and string orchestra, commissioned by the Genesis Foundation, was performed – as at its premiere – by The Sixteen and Britten Sinfonia conducted by Harry Christophers.

“...one of those performances during which you can hardly breathe for fear of missing a nuance of expression... utterly gripping... the power and passion with which the 26 professional singers tackled MacMillan's ferocious choral demands – from austere plainsong to stratospheric solos, and from whispers and chordal clusters to ravishing close harmonies – sent shivers down the spine.” *The Times*



James MacMillan's *Stabat Mater*, performed in the Sistine Chapel by The Sixteen and Britten Sinfonia conducted by Harry Christophers.

## Goldschmidt Beatrice Cenci returns in Bregenz



Berthold Goldschmidt's opera *Beatrice Cenci* receives its first Austrian staging at the Bregenz Festival in July. The new production by Johannes Erath is conducted by Johannes Debus with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra and Prague Philharmonic Choir. Events in Bregenz also include a concert with music from Goldschmidt's ballet *Chronica*, and a discussion on the theme of exile led by Michael Haas, producer of the Sony recording of *Beatrice Cenci*.

Goldschmidt's early career in Germany, including the successful premiere of his first opera *Der gewaltige Hahnrei* (*The Mighty Cuckold*), was thwarted by the Nazi rise to power. He fled to London in 1935 and tried to rekindle his career in post-war Britain. *Beatrice Cenci* was completed in

1950 as an entry in the Festival of Britain opera competition, but his joint-winning work was not performed.

In 1958 he shifted his focus from composing to conducting, including a 1960 broadcast with the BBC Symphony Orchestra of Mahler's *Symphony No. 10* in the complete performing version he had reconstructed in collaboration with Deryck Cooke. Goldschmidt was persuaded to start composing again in the 1980s and enjoyed an Indian Summer thanks to a run of prestigious performances including *Ciaccona Sinfonica* conducted by Simon Rattle in Birmingham and *Der gewaltige Hahnrei* staged by Harry Kupfer at the Komische Oper in Berlin, and a series of recordings on Decca.

Goldschmidt first came across the lurid tale of the Roman nobleman Francesco Cenci in a novella by Stendahl but decided to base his libretto upon Shelley's play *The Cenci*. When Beatrice Cenci's father celebrates the murder of his sons and subjects his daughter to violent abuse, she plots to kill him in revenge. Goldschmidt's opera received concert performances in London and Berlin and a belated stage premiere in Magdeburg in 1994.

The composer's 1953 *Cello Concerto*, completed a few years after *Beatrice Cenci*, is soon to appear on a new recording from CPO with Raphael Wallfisch as soloist.

## Birtwistle in Aldeburgh



The Aldeburgh Festival plays host to a pair of Birtwistle performances on 18 June in a concert conducted by Oliver Knussen: the world premiere of *Keyboard Engine* and the first UK performance of the complete *Three Songs from the Holy Forest*. This continues the festival's

close relationship with the composer in recent decades including first performances of *The Io Passion*, *The Corridor*, *The Cure*, *Neruda Madrigales* and *Songs from the Same Earth*.

*Keyboard Engine* is a new 15-minute ‘construction’ for two pianos written for Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Tamara Stefanovich, co-commissioned by Aldeburgh Festival, Carnegie Hall, KölnMusik GmbH, and Cal Performances at the University of California. Following its Aldeburgh premiere, first performances in the USA are scheduled in New York and Chicago in October and Berkeley in November.

The new score is a further exploration of Birtwistle's fascination with clocks, mechanisms and machines. As Paul Griffiths observes in his programme note: “Speeds are generally fast, the two pianos meshing together or on separate courses. There is a sense, the composer suggests, of a machine that is in hectic activity but stationary. We are not being taken anywhere; we are observing wild action, though this constructed whirlwind can be interrupted by gentle contrapuntal song.”

*The Three Songs from the Holy Forest* are settings for soprano and ensemble of poetry by Robin Blaser, the writer who provided Birtwistle with the libretto for *The Last Supper* and who was remembered in *The Moth Requiem*, and the new work again recalls their shared interest in the world of moths.

Other recent Birtwistle premieres include the miniature *Intrada* for piano and percussion, written for the talents of Nicolas Hodges and Colin Currie, who have performed the work at the Library of Congress in Washington and the Southbank Centre in London.

## Simpson Cello Concerto

“Is there no challenging format that the composer Mark Simpson cannot conquer?” asked *The Times* in its review of the world premiere of the composer's *Cello Concerto*. “This 29-year-old British firecracker, the BBC Philharmonic's present composer in association, has already done wonders with that old-fashioned monster the oratorio (*The Immortal*) and would probably do likewise if he wrote 32 variations on the theme tune of *Peppa Pig*.” The positive response to the new *Cello Concerto* ended with a declaration that “this is a contemporary piece with a pulsing heart and I found it irresistible”.



Photo: Sam Carey-Carrie

**“...music airborne, kaleidoscopic, swirling with life...”**

*The Times*

Simpson composed the concerto for rising star cellist Leonard Elschenbroich, who gave the premiere in April in Manchester with the BBC Philharmonic conducted by Clemens Schuldt. According to the composer, his ambition was to create a work “with the drama coming through melody, explored in a number of different aspects: first hyper-lyricism, then lament, and finally dancing”.

“Mark Simpson's *Cello Concerto* is totally original. The premiere confirmed him as one of the UK's most exciting young talents... It plays continuously but clearly falls into a fast-slow-fast scheme, which pivots about the anguished lament that the cello sings over a web of divided strings at its centre... It is both immediately compelling and mysterious at the same time... nothing is ever quite what it seems.”

*The Guardian*

Simpson's parallel career as a soloist brings performances including Magnus Lindberg's *Clarinet Concerto* at the BBC Proms in July and the world premiere of his own *Clarinet Concerto* in Manchester next June with the BBC Philharmonic.

## Van der Aa premieres in the USA

Michel van der Aa has enjoyed a series of prestigious premieres in the USA over the past season, spreading increased awareness of his music in North America. His 3D chamber opera *Blank Out* was staged to acclaim at the Park Avenue Armory in New York last September and March brought the US premieres of *Sunken Garden* at Dallas Opera and of the *Violin Concerto* with Janine Jansen and the Philadelphia Orchestra under Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

As the *Dallas News* summed it up, “*Sunken Garden* takes opera into new dimensions – literally”, with the characters on stage and the audience donning 3D glasses at the midpoint of the opera to enter a sinister garden that is being used to trap souls. The libretto by David Mitchell blends mystery and sci-fi to further explore the key existential themes familiar from his novels such as *Cloud Atlas*. The Dallas production followed full stagings in London, Amsterdam and Lyon, and performances in Amsterdam and Essen of a semi-staged version for concert halls which combines the 2D and 3D film with a simplified set.

“In *Sunken Garden*, van der Aa moved outside the boundaries of opera to create a fantasy world where

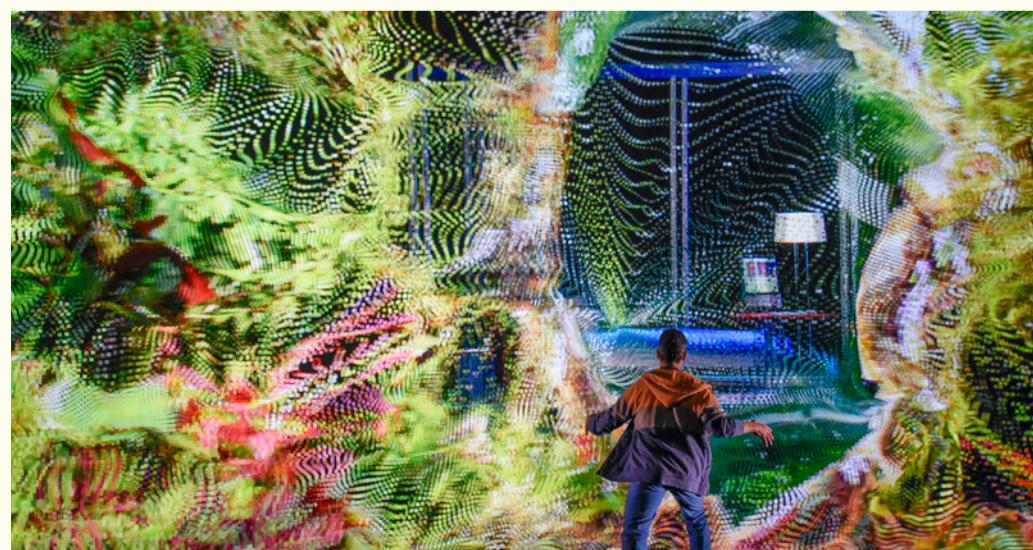
the difficult questions of life cannot be escaped... The most prominent examples concern guilt, sorrow, and the choice between an authentic life and a virtual one... David Mitchell's image of dusk as the place between light and dark, life and death was especially powerful... This dense story is filled with symbolism and allegory.”

*Dallas Observer*

Van der Aa's *Violin Concerto*, performed in Philadelphia and toured to Carnegie Hall in New York, was described in the *Philadelphia Enquirer* as a “gleefully rambunctious concerto which freely explores gestures with collage-like interplay...” Janine Jansen's performances followed those in Amsterdam, Essen, Bergen and a recording with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under Vladimir Jurowski.

“Mr. van der Aa's solo writing demands extreme virtuosity, which, of course, the charismatic Ms. Jansen dispatches with athletic ease. But the orchestra is less an accompanist or combatant than a full collaborator in a kind of shifting synergy – now taking its cues and motivic material from the soloist, now driving the soloist to greater heights of passionate expression.”

*New York Times*



Michel van der Aa's 3D opera *Sunken Garden*, in its US premiere staging at the Dallas Opera.

Photo: © Karen Almond

