

WIGMORE HALL



Saturday 10 June 2023

3.00pm

Borletti-Buitoni Trust 20th Anniversary Weekend

Mark Simpson clarinet
Adam Walker flute
Timothy Ridout viola
Sivan Magen harp
Alexi Kenney violin
Filippo Gorini piano

Mark Simpson (b.1988)

Darkness Moves (2016)

*Commissioned by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust
and dedicated to Franco Buitoni and Ilaria Borletti Buitoni*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Sonata for flute, viola and harp (1915)

*I. Pastorale. Lento, dolce rubato • II. Interlude. Tempo di
Minuetto • III. Final. Allegro moderato ma risoluto*

Angélica Negrón (b.1981)

The Violinist for violin solo with electronics (2022) *UK première*
Commissioned by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust

Salina Fisher (b.1993)

Hikari for solo violin (2022) *UK première*
Commissioned by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Suite from *L'histoire du soldat* (1918-9)

*I. The Soldier's March • II. The Soldier's Violin • III. The Little
Concert • IV. Tango, Waltz, Ragtime • V. The Devil's Dance*

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Mark Simpson's *Darkness Moves*, dedicated 'to Franco and Ilaria, with thanks to the Borletti-Buitoni Trust', marked the final project of his 2014 BBT fellowship, explicitly created to be premiered online. Composed in 2016, we filmed the première in Quilter Hall just opposite Wells Cathedral on 7 August and it was premiered on BBT's website on 25 October.

Mark explains its genesis: 'The poetry of Belgian Henri Michaux is a truly visceral, oftentimes frightening and even euphoric experience. Bodies are contorted, dismembered, writhing; and thoughts of dark, nightmarish images invite you to the furthest extremities of the human imagination. I wanted to try and capture the essence of this musically and used the brilliant anthology, *Darkness Moves*, to form a framework of the piece. With these images and a general sense of the atmosphere I wrote *Darkness Moves* as a kind of half-improvisation.'

In two large sections, 'the first is otherworldly, slow, undulating, slimy and dirty. It uses fractured melodies and glissandos that don't seem to quite ever take shape, distorted by wild outbursts leading to nightmarish hyperactive wails and screams. The second part is fleeting, hurried and blurred, ending in a wild, brutal, but ultimately euphoric climax that gradually and quite suddenly decays into the ether, as if the whole experience itself was a kind of dream or hallucination.'

Debussy's 'Trio' Sonata was one of his last works, the second of a projected set of 'six sonates pour divers instruments' begun in 1915. He identified himself on all his last three sonatas as a 'musicien français'. Composed between September and early October 1915, at seaside retreat Mon Coin, Pourville, the surroundings had an effect on the music, Debussy remarking that it 'ended up so beautiful that I almost have to apologise for it.' Coming directly after his austere piano *Etudes* the contrast is marked, although Stephen Walsh, in his Debussy monograph, sees connections between the ornamentation of his last-composed *Etude, Pour les agréments*, and 'the airy filigree of the flute and harp parts.' In a letter to Robert Godet, Debussy confessed that it is 'the music of a Debussy whom I no longer know. It is terribly sad and I do not know whether to laugh or cry at it... Perhaps both?'

The beguiling sonata-form *Pastorale* contains the work's kernel, especially as the *Final* refers back to it and returns full circle. Muted viola joins the rapt and languorous opening flute and harp. Then, unmuted, it introduces the fanfare motif to open a faster, more energised section, the movement swinging between these two. The bucolic *Interlude* revels in dovetailed flute and viola interchanges over harp filigree, gently gaining speed and ebbing away. Coming together in unison, carefree excitement sees them both skitter away again, twisting and turning. Harp strumming introduces the more frenetic *Final*, with a pentatonic theme and Eastern harmonies, before the *Pastorale* music returns to bring the work to a close.

As part of his *Shifting Ground* project, which is already recorded and awaiting release, Alexi Kenney used some of his 2020 BBT award to commission two new works. Puerto Rican-born **Angélica Negrón's** *The Violinist* takes its inspiration from a short story by Ana Fabrega, told in loops and echoes via the electronics, with the violin weaving music in accompaniment to the narration. It's every player's nightmare, nerves before a performance: but what if, in the dressing room, you realise that you don't know how to play the violin and you're just about to walk out as first violinist with the New York Philharmonic? What follows reveals the transformative power of not only music itself, but also performing for a live audience.

New Zealand-born **Salina Fisher** writes of her commission *Hikari*: 'The title of this piece means "light", "brightness", or "radiance". It leans into the violin's natural resonance and brilliance with a musical language integrated into the instrument's expressive warmth and lyricism with more "transparent" timbres, in a constant search for light. The featured open string-crossing is an homage to Bach's *Chaconne*, a work that is both central to this recital and to my own relationship with the violin.'

At the end of the First World War, **Stravinsky**, along with similarly destitute colleagues – writer Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, designer René Auberjonois and conductor Ernest Ansermet – created a work that could be easily toured around Switzerland: *L'histoire du soldat*. In the event, there was only one single performance at Lausanne's Théâtre Municipal on 28 September 1918. The following year Stravinsky fashioned from it a five-movement suite for violin, clarinet and piano, premiered in Lausanne on 8 November 1919 and dedicated to amateur clarinettist Werner Reinhart who subsidised the concert.

Adapted from Alexander Afanasyev's *The Deserter and the Devil, A Soldier's Tale* is a Faustian story of a weary soldier trading his violin with the Devil for a book that can see into the future and make a man's fortune. Regretting the bargain, he wins his violin back in a high-risk game of cards with the Devil and his playing then helps a princess to recover from illness. Of course, though, the Devil has the last laugh and claims the soldier's soul in the end.

Following part of the story's arc, the *Suite* opens with the jaunty *Soldier's March*, accompanied by a heavy tramping tread. The three inner movements portray the skittish *Soldier's Violin*, the jubilant *Little Concert* he plays after he's won his violin back and the three tunes – *Tango*, *Waltz*, *Ragtime* – to which the Princess dances after her recovery. When the Devil appears, the Soldier plays *The Devil's Dance* to make him dance involuntarily, thus thwarting his plans – albeit, in the original story, only temporarily.

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