

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 24 April 2022 7.30pm 'Once upon a time...'

Lawrence Power viola, director

Collegium

Charlotte Spruit violin	Roman Lytwyniw violin	Hugh Mackay cello
Yaore Talibart violin	Otoha Tabata viola	Harry Atkinson double bass
Katherine Yoon violin	Madeleine Pickering viola	Will Duerden double bass
Hana Mizuta Spencer violin	Kinga Wojdalska viola	Louis Moisan lute
Esther Park violin	Wallis Power cello	

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Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Thomas Larcher (b.1963)

Matthew Locke (c.1621-1677)

John Cage (1912-1992)

John Woolrich (b.1954)

Luke Bedford (b.1978)

Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-2016)

Cassandra Miller (b.1976)

Heinrich Biber (1644-1704)

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Curtain Tune from *Timon of Athens* Z632 (1695)

Nucleus (2021)

Curtain Tune from *The Tempest* (1674)

Story from *Living Room Music* (1940)

Ulysses Awakes (1989) *based on Claudio Monteverdi*

Wonderful Two-Headed Nightingale (2011)

Farewell to Stromness from *The Yellow Cake Revue* Op. 88 (1980)

Interval

Just So (2008 rev. 2017)

Battalia a10 (1673)

*Sonata - Die liederliche Gesellschaft von allerley Humor -
Presto - Der Mars - Presto - Aria - Die Schlacht -
Lamento der Verwundten Musquetirer. Adagio*

Chamber Symphony in C minor Op. 110a (1960 arr. 1974) *transcribed by
Rudolf Barshai*

I. Largo • II. Allegro molto • III. Allegretto • IV. Largo • V. Largo

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All music tells stories – stories of its creators, of its time. And the stories aren't confined to or fixed within the score – each performer brings their own telling; listeners create narratives unique to them.

The clearest intertwining of music and storytelling is of course in the theatre, and here Collegium performs two 'curtain tunes' from two adaptations of Shakespeare plays staged in 17th-century England: **Henry Purcell's** from *Timon of Athens* – a lively and driving chord sequence – and Purcell's older colleague **Matthew Locke's** for *The Tempest*, a slower, unfurling tapestry punctuated, naturally enough, by stormy interruptions.

In between is *Nucleus* by Austrian composer **Thomas Larcher**, a short trio for low strings. It's music of considerable charm, with an unruffled, unhurried quality. The viola generally snakes around similar waltz-like shapes, only once building to an intense climax (the first appearance of the double bass's string tuned down to a very low A), but closing enigmatically.

If all music tells stories, **John Cage's** *Story*, from *Living Room Music* of 1940 tells *storytelling*. Without instruments, the performers rhythmically chant text (or deconstructed fragments thereof) by Gertrude Stein: 'once upon a time the world was round and you could go on it around and around'. From our modern vantage point (listeners tell stories too), we bring our own associations: it is easy to hear pre-echoes of rapping, of beatboxing, of turntablism – the 't-t-t-t-t' of the hi-hat, the mid-tempo groove, the DJ scratching the record to repeat tiny phrases.

'Ulysses Awakes', an aria from **Monteverdi's** *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, is reworked by **John Woolrich** for a solo viola as protagonist – 'Am I still asleep, or awake?...what air do I breathe...what ground do I tread?'. The violist starts off fairly faithfully to Ulysses's melody, but begins to weave more elaborate ornamentation, finding a kind of notated liquidity in tempo. The string ensemble, too, becomes more emboldened: starting off from the depths as a resonating chamber for the soloist, it begins to lean into some of the most piquant dissonances, to find melodic fragments of its own. Gradually, the 'ground' the violist 'treads' becomes more unstable, more unfamiliar. An impassioned viola recitative subsides and the piece's final portion sees the orchestra in drowsier mood.

If Woolrich's hero was half asleep, the two protagonists of **Luke Bedford's** *Wonderful Two-Headed Nightingale* are brilliantly wide-eyed and present. The title comes from a 19th-century poster advertising a pair of singing conjoined twins. Indeed the twin soloists (violin and viola) are conjoined almost throughout, either showing off their resonant open strings, or locked together playing in octaves. The central tension of the piece is heard in its first *tutti* chord – open fifths, with a lone cellist playing an F tuned a quarter-tone flat. The central battle in this piece then, is not between two soloists, or between soloists and ensemble, but between the open, clear sound of those fifths, and the more pungent, acidic quarter-tones. The more familiar the surroundings, the more uncanny the impact when things are subtly shifted.

In 1980, as part of local protests against a proposed uranium mine on the island of Orkney, **Peter Maxwell Davies** wrote *The Yellow Cake Revue* for voice and piano. It contained two short piano interludes – a fast 'reel' (*Yesnaby Ground*) and a stately, evocative 'strathspey', or Scottish country dance (*Farewell to Stromness*). Long after the plans were eventually shelved, it has become Maxwell Davies's most enduringly popular composition – not many former *enfants terribles* of British music have their music played at the wedding of the Prince of Wales...

Cassandra Miller's *Just So* is a piece for string quartet, but one would be forgiven for thinking it's a violin solo – that's how it stays for around three quarters of its short duration. The soloist dances in harmonics ('wistful but happy, as a country fiddler') in simple, rotating patterns. When the rest of the quartet finally enter, they join in the dance high in the stratosphere, but throwing in rich and sonorous strokes on their resonant lower strings.

Imitation of battles has often been a trope of classical music. It was a particularly popular genre in middle Europe during the 17th-century Ottoman wars, the most famous example being **Heinrich Biber's** extravagantly pictorial *Battalia*. The instrumental writing is dazzling – most notably for experimental techniques not otherwise seen for another few centuries (striking strings with the wood of the bow, snapping strings against fingerboards to evoke gunfire, placing paper in the strings to imitate military drums). We end, however, in a mournful *Adagio* – the 'lament of the wounded musketeer'.

Lamentation continues with the Chamber Symphony of **Dmitry Shostakovich** – an arrangement of his famous Eighth String Quartet. Dedicated to the 'victims of fascism and war', it has also become emblematic of the popular image of Shostakovich – troubled, mournful, a purveyor both of terrifying intensity and lonely interiority. An autobiography of sorts, the piece features much self-quotation, and is dominated by his name in musical notes: DSCH (in German musical notation, D, E flat, C, B).

The opening is a solemn *ricercar* on the DSCH motto, with plaintive thematic resonances of his first and fifth symphonies. The second is one of Shostakovich's demonic, out-of-control *scherzi* – machine-like, menacing, building to a wild iteration of the 'Jewish' theme from his Second Piano Trio. This gradually collides with the DSCH motto as it slides towards the eccentric waltz of the third movement.

The fourth starts bleakly – three brutal downstrokes, like an ominous knock at the door (potentially *very* ominous in Soviet Russia), and some almost unbearably intense sustained chords. After quoting a revolutionary prison song, 'Tormented by grievous bondage', the DSCH *ricercar* material returns for the fifth movement. We end as we began, now muted, muffled – muzzled?

