

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 27 October 2022
7.30pm

Oliver Wass harp

12 Ensemble

Eloisa-Fleur Thom violin
Roberto Ruisi violin
Zahra Benyounes violin
Emily Holland violin
Agata Daraškaite violin
Juliette Roos violin
Venetia Jollands violin
Ellie Consta violin

Luba Tunnicliffe viola
Matthew Kettle viola
Tetsuumi Nagata viola
Connie Pharoah viola
Max Ruisi cello
Sergio Serra cello
Peteris Sokolovskis cello
Toby Hughes double bass

Anon Romanian Byzantine chant *arranged by Max Ruisi*

Edmund Finnis (b.1984) The Centre is Everywhere (2019)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) Danse sacrée et danse profane (1904)
Danse sacrée • Danse profane

Interval

George Enescu (1881-1955) String Octet in C Op. 7 (full string orchestra version) (1900)
*Très modéré - Très fougueux - Lentement -
Mouvement de valse bien rythmée*

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12 Ensemble begins its programme with an anonymous Romanian Byzantine chant, arranged for strings by the ensemble's artistic director **Max Ruisi**.

Edmund Finnis is a prominent composer of both classical and electronic music. After studying with Julian Anderson and Paul Newland, Finnis completed a doctorate at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. He is currently a Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music. *The Centre is Everywhere* was commissioned by Manchester Collective, who premièred the 12 minute, single-movement work in July 2019. *The Times* called it 'ineffably beautiful', whilst *BBC Music Magazine* found it possesses 'an ageless, ancient-yet-modern quality like a shimmering ghost'. Finnis has written about the piece:

'The title comes from an anonymous medieval definition of God as "an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere". The beautiful intangibility of this image captured my imagination. It came back to me early on while thinking about this piece and somehow guided my decisions about how to shape the music. The movement of sounds and ideas around the space of an ensemble of string players was integral to my thinking about this piece. The twelve musicians create together a layered musical space through which interlocking patterns of sound emerge, accumulate and disperse. The music is replete with overlapping lines that rise and fall, moving from hushed white-noise to wide, full-bodied sound and back again in wavelike motions.'

The chromatic harp was invented by the Parisian instrument manufacturer Pleyel in 1897. The major innovation of this new instrument was to apply the principle of piano stringing to the harp, with two intercrossing rows of strings, one string for each note and semitone. Although this simplified playing technique by making the standard double-action harp's complex pedalling system redundant, Pleyel's instrument never caught on owing to its enlarged size, complex tuning and because it restricted the playing of *glissandi* – arguably the most notable feature of harp writing – solely to the key of C major. Pleyel attempted to popularise the instrument by commissioning new works from contemporary composers - among them Fauré, Enescu and **Debussy**. Debussy wrote *Danse sacrée et danse profane* in 1904 as a competition piece for the Brussels Conservatoire, and today it is usually played on a double-action harp. The work's two movements are played without a break. *Danse sacrée*, written in D minor, is notable for the chord progressions heard in the harp part. Debussy admired Erik Satie's *Gymnopédies* for piano and seemingly channels their ambiance in his attempt to evoke an ancient Grecian spirit. *Danse profane* uses the interval of a falling fourth, heard in the final bars of the first movement, as a structural element within its contrasting D major waltz. There is more interplay between the harp and the accompanying strings in this movement. The movement's title hints at earthly love and reaches a passionate climax before a subdued conclusion.

The string octet is a comparatively rare musical form. Although others exist, those by Felix Mendelssohn and **Enescu** are noteworthy for their youthful brilliance, mastery of form and melodic invention. Often played in its original form, Enescu sanctioned performances of his Octet by larger string ensembles, as in tonight's concert, to increase public knowledge of his work.

Enescu entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1895 at the age of 14 to study violin and composition, after five years' study in Vienna. His Octet dates from 1900, one year after he finished his Parisian studies. The writing oozes an amazing degree of confidence. This can be attributed in part to the influence of its dedicatee André Gedalge, Enescu's Parisian fugue tutor.

'With the Octet I was rapidly improving, becoming my own person as a composer,' Enescu admitted. Regarding the challenges experienced in writing it, he remarked, 'I was gripped by the problem of construction. I wrote it in four connected movements in such a way that, although each movement has its own independence, the whole piece would form a large-scale single movement in sonata form. I crushed myself with the effort of keeping aloft a piece of music in four sections, of such length that each one seemed about to fall apart at any moment. No engineer putting his first suspension bridge in place can have agonised more than I did, as I gradually filled my manuscript paper with notes.'

A challenge for performers is establishing the minute shifts of tempo that Enescu specifically asks for whilst maintaining the overall structure. To create instrumental balance, Enescu often pairs one part with another against a backdrop provided by the other members of the ensemble.

Listening to the work in performance, it is easy to be swept along by the intricately woven profusion of ideas that it contains. The first movement, which forms the exposition of the extended sonata form, is based upon seven distinct musical subjects. They offer a range of moods from the dramatic or dynamic to those that are lyrical or nostalgic in nature, with echoes of Romanian folk music being made apparent. The second and third movements together form the development section of the sonata. They principally enhance the thematic material already presented, but present a number of new ideas as well. The second movement most clearly displays Gedalge's influence by being a daringly tempestuous fugue. The third movement offers contrast since it has a largely nocturnal feel about it. The final movement summarises all the major ideas; by recalling the opening theme, it underlines the cyclical nature of the score. Initially, it seems improbable that the movement is written as a waltz, but the form serves the purpose of allowing themes to be combined, superimposed and intervals of seconds, thirds, sixths or sevenths to be explored.

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