

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 16 November 2024
1.00pm

10th Anniversary Concert

Matthew Knight artistic director

Septura

Phil Cobb trumpet
James Fountain trumpet
Alan Thomas trumpet
Matthew Gee trombone
Helen Vollam trombone
Daniel West trombone
Peter Smith tuba

Orlande de Lassus c.1530-1594)

Lagrimae di San Pietro (1594) *arranged by Matthew Knight*
Il magnanimo Pietro • Nessun fedel trovai • Come falda di neve • Vattene vita, va • O vita troppo rea • Negando il mio signor • Vide homo

Roxanna Panufnik b.1968)

Seven Heavens (2024) *world première*
I. Paradise of Adan • II. Paradise of Firdaus • III. Paradise of Naeem • IV. Paradise of Mawa • V. House of Qurūb • VI. Paradise of Al-Aliyah • VII. House of al-Salam

Interval

Sergey Prokofiev 1891-1953)

From 10 Pieces Op. 12 (1906-13) *arranged by Simon Cox*
Marche • Gavotte • Scherzo humoristique • Allemande

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No. 8 in C minor Op. 110 (1960) *arranged by Simon Cox and Matthew Knight*
I. Largo • II. Allegro molto • III. Allegretto • IV. Largo • V. Largo



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

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Septura was born out of a passion for the sound of brass instruments. We wanted to harness their intense emotional power to produce transformative musical experiences for our audiences. But a decade ago we had a problem: our brand new formation was bereft of repertoire. So we set about constructing our 'counterfactual history' – imagining that the great composers had written for brass.

Ten years and nine recordings later our oeuvre is extensive – arrangements and original works spanning five centuries and many genres, shining a spotlight on underrepresented composers. Today we première the latest addition, *Seven Heavens* by **Roxanna Panufnik**.

The influence of Abrahamic religions is felt in much of Septura's repertoire, and this spiritual element was Roxanna's starting point: her piece is based on the Muslim concept of seven levels, or 'Jannah', of paradisiacal afterlife. She writes: 'Each heaven has its own unique atmosphere, and is portrayed in a short movement, where one of the players is featured as a soloist. Throughout the piece I have used Arab *maqams* (or scales) to place the work's sound world at the source of Islam'.

Accompanied by a swirling river, the tuba guides us through the *Paradise of Adan*. Gentle fanfares complement a noble bass trombone in the *Paradise of Firdaus*. The blissful *Paradise of Naeem* features the second trombone, then the first depicts the Lote tree in the *Paradise of Mawa*. Reverential hymn-like harmonies accompany the second trumpet in the *House of Qurūb*. The highest place in paradise, *Al-Aliyah*, naturally features the piccolo trumpet. Finally we reach the *House of al-Salam*: the river returns and the first trumpet leads us to 'jubilant splendour'.

The symbolism of the number seven is also significant in our opening piece: the *Lagrime di San Pietro* by **Orlande de Lassus**. Completed just weeks before he died in 1594, Lassus's final composition is a cycle of sacred madrigals, setting non-liturgical poems by Luigi Tansillo which relate the grief of Peter after his denial of Christ. The number seven (representing the seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary) abounds: seven voices sing 21 pieces (seven times the Holy Trinity), using seven of the eight church modes.

We will play just seven movements: *Il magnanimo Pietro* describes Peter's shame; in *Nessun fedel trovai* Christ describes the pain of betrayal; *Come falda di neve* portrays a melting snowbank as a metaphor for Peter's tears; Peter yearns for the punishment of death in *Vattene vita* and *Negando il mil signor*.

Composing madrigals – with vernacular texts – afforded Lassus the freedom for more personal, emotionally-charged music than was acceptable in counter-reformation liturgical works. However, the final movement is a Latin motet, in which the focus shifts to the sinfulness and ingratitude of all mankind. The bitter emotion of the preceding madrigals remains, but now cloaked in liturgical formality.

Five years before he wrote his *Overture on Hebrew Themes*, and long before turning to Christian Science, **Prokofiev** composed his Op. 12 suite for piano. There is no reference to faith – Prokofiev was an atheist at the time – but the piece is an early foray into Neoclassicism, venerating 18th-century dances, especially in the *Gavotte* and grotesque *Allemande*. The spiky opening *Marche*, repeatedly lurching between F and F-sharp minor, foreshadows the more famous March from *The Love of Three Oranges*. The *Scherzo humoristique* ironically sets an agile dance in the piano's grumbling low register – we use the comically inelegant and unwieldy three trombones and tuba.

Our final piece was written in the ruins of war-torn Dresden in July 1960: **Dmitry Shostakovich's** iconic Eighth string quartet. As with many of Shostakovich's works, a highly-polarised debate has raged about the piece's 'meaning'. Dedicated 'to the victims of fascism and war', is this the work of a supporter of the Soviet regime – with literal representations of the drone of a Western bomber, and stuttering anti-aircraft fire? Or, as Solomon Volkov's 1979 Shostakovich 'memoir' *Testimony* (now widely discredited) alleges, is it the manifesto of a closet dissident, bemoaning the artistic straitjacket of Socialist Realism – quoting the revolutionary song 'Tormented by Harsh Captivity', and a Siberian prison aria from Shostakovich's own opera, *Lady Macbeth*?

Volkov's view is bolstered by the profoundly personal nature of the piece, written shortly after Shostakovich's reluctant joining of the Communist Party. His musical signature (the German note names D, eS, C, H) binds together the five interconnected movements: the melancholic counterpoint in the C minor outer movements; the aggressive G-sharp minor dance of the second; the grotesque G minor waltz of the third; and the stark drama of the fourth. But there are many elements without autobiographical connection, not least the 'Jewish' theme in the second movement, an apparent reference to the Holocaust. Shostakovich explained that: 'Jewish folk music made a most powerful impression on me...it can appear happy while it is tragic. It's laughter through tears. This...is close to my ideas of what music should be. There should always be two layers'. The musical quotations provide some justification for arranging the piece: it cannot be said to 'belong' exclusively to strings. The scope is almost symphonic, suiting the greater dynamic range of brass. This gets to the heart of Septura's purpose, and the root of this programme: at a time when conflict between people of different nationalities and religions is at the forefront of all our minds, the universal language of music provides a message of interfaith unity. What better medium than the brass septet to amplify that message, loud and clear?

The first ten years of our project have been a voyage of discovery, mining the rich seam of the septet's sound: we thank you for joining us on that journey, and look forward to what the next decade may bring.

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