

---

Ensemble 10/10: Mark Simpson  
Thursday 23 May 2019 7.30pm  
St George's Hall Concert Room  
sponsored by Investec

---

MARK SIMPSON (b.1988)  
Straw Dogs

Gary Carpenter studied composition at the Royal College of Music with John Lambert. He has lived in Holland and Germany and has written operas, musicals (including Goodnight Mister Tom with Michelle Magorian), ballets, a radio music-drama (The One Alone with Iris Murdoch) and much concert music. Musical director and/or arranger-orchestrator on many stage shows and films (including The Wicker Man, 1972), his Azaleas for harp trio received a 2006 British Composer Award in the chamber category and Van Assendelft's Vermeer for clavichord (premiered by Pamela Nash) won the British Clavichord Society's Composition Competition in 2003.

A portrait CD, Die Flimmerkiste, is available on NMC. Recent works include The Listening Project Symphony (Radio 4, Prix Europa 2013 nominee), Fred and Ginger (London Symphony, Daniel Harding), SET (Iain Ballamy tenor sax, BBC Philharmonic, HK Gruber), The Food Of Love, twelve Shakespeare songs commissioned by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and Dadaville (BBC Symphony, Sakari Oramo) for the First Night of the 2015 Proms. His orchestral work Willie Stock was premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival 2016 with the BBC Symphony conducted by Oliver Knussen. He recently wrote the music for the audio book version of David Sedaris's memoirs Theft By Finding.

Gary is Professor of Composition at the Royal Northern College of Music and a professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

Recent works and current projects include: Johnny Spielt Aus for soprano saxophone and piano (commissioned by John Harle, 2017) and Latchford Locks for wind orchestra (North Cheshire Wind Orchestra and Tracy Woods commission, 2018). A CD of his orchestral music with the RLPO is in preparation for recording and release 2018-19.

Straw Dogs is a reaction to the following passage from John Gray's book *Straw Dogs*: "In ancient Chinese rituals, straw dogs were used as offerings to the gods. During the ritual they were treated with utmost reverence. When it was over and they were no longer needed they were trampled on and tossed aside: 'Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs.' If humans disturb the balance of the Earth they will be trampled on and tossed aside. Critics of Gaia theory say they reject it because it is unscientific. The truth is that they fear and hate it because it means that humans can never be other than straw dogs." I take the ideas of reverence and destruction and apply them in a musical setting. Long, yearning melodies set against turbulent textural passages characterise the first half of the piece whilst the second half is more reflective and leads towards a destructive climax.

© Mark Simpson

Straw Dogs was first performed by Ensemble 10/10, conducted by Nicholas Collon, in the Great Hall, The Cornerstone, Liverpool Hope University, in May 2010.

GARY CARPENTER (b.1951)

Da Capo

Da Capo was first performed by the London Sinfonietta in 1983. It is a six minute scherzo and trio in which five wildly disparate musical characters (alto flute, english horn, bass clarinet, viola and cello) achieve common purpose and peace through the at first assertive but ultimately conciliatory offices of the piano.

© Gary Carpenter

GAVIN HIGGINS (b.1983)

What Wild Ecstasy

Described as 'boldly imaginative' and 'extraordinary', Gavin Higgins has been consistently praised by critics for his distinct and visceral compositional style.

The early stages of his career saw Higgins receive substantial commissions, working with some of the country's leading orchestras, including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, Northern Sinfonia and the National Youth Wind Orchestra of Great Britain. He has worked with soloists and ensembles such as Mark Simpson, the Flotilla Saxophone Quartet, the Tredegar Town Band, Rambert Orchestra, London Sinfonietta and the Fidelio Trio.

The Gloucester-born composer comes from a long lineage of brass band musicians, dating back to 1895. Growing up in the Forest of Dean, he followed an initial musical training in the family brass band, with studies of French horn and composition at Chetham's School of Music, the Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal College of Music with Gary Carpenter and Ken Hesketh.

Higgins has continued this heritage with high profile commissions and performances of vigorous, daring brass band pieces including Freaks (2007), Tango (2008), Fanfares and Love Songs

(2009) for the National Children's Band of Great Britain, and, Destroy, Trample, As Swiftly As She, commissioned for the 2011 European Brass Band Championships in Montreux, Switzerland. In 2010 he was appointed Rambert Dance Company's Inaugural Music Fellow.

The recording of Dark Arteries won the British Bandsman CD of the year award, Brass Band World CD of the award and the 4barsrest CD and Newcomer of the year award.

A growing collection of ensemble and orchestral works have been featured at major festivals, such as the saxophone quartet, ENDGAME, commissioned as part of the 2011 Cheltenham Festival; and Der Aufstand, commissioned as part of the 2012 BBC Proms.

Recent successes includes performances of Tänze by the London Philharmonic; the premiere of The Ruins of Detroit by the Fidelio Trio at the Cheltenham Festival; and the premiere of Velocity at the Last Night of the 2014 Proms.

Upcoming performances include a new trombone concerto for Helen Vollam and the BBC Symphony Orchestra Gavin's first opera, with children's author Francesca Simon, for the Royal Opera House.

The composer writes:

When I was approached to write a new score to sit alongside Debussy's masterpiece Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune, it soon became clear that it would not be a partner piece, nor a modern day version, but rather a reaction to all the work's incarnations: Mallarmé's poem, Debussy's music and Nijinsky's choreography.

If the Faun of Mallarmé and Debussy's creation were hazy and elusive in mood, sensual and soporific in character, our faun

would be direct, feral, sexually aggressive and Dionysian in sheer exuberance.

I drew from the Pan Myth, John Keats' 1819 poem 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (from which the title comes), and the numerous artistic images inspired by the lascivious shenanigans of mythological fauns.

The work is structured in three core sections consisting of a series of musical outbursts that fly by one after the other. Material from previous sections bleed into the next, driving relentlessly and sometimes manically forward. Though there are moments of stillness they are soon superseded by brassy growls and rhythmic dances.

What Wild Ecstasy was premiered by Rambert Dance Company on 15 February 2012, at His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen. The commission was supported by the PRS and New Music 20x12.

HANS WERNER HENZE (1926-2012)

The Miracle of the Rose

Entrée

Plainte

Rigaudon

Promenade

Loure

Chansons provençales

Hans Werner Henze was a leading figure on Germany's post-war avant-garde music scene, despite choosing to live for most of his life in Italy. One of Henze's first jobs was on the music staff of Bielefeld Theatre in North West Germany. Theatrical elements are found in many of Henze's works, even those written for the concert hall rather than the theatre and even where, on the surface, no theatrical elements appear.

The Miracle of the Rose, scored for 13 instruments, is one such work. It carries the subtitle 'imaginary theatre' and extends Henze's interest in re-imagining texts in music without recourse to singing. Henze wanted to imbue his music with a precise linguistic character; in 1953 he 're-imagined' Shelley's poem Ode to the West Wind in a work for cello and orchestra and from 1991-93 wrote a series of instrumental concertos in the form of a Requiem. In between, in 1982, came the composer's instrumental reflection on Jean Genet's autobiographical account of time spent in two French prisons, Le Miracle de la Rose.

Genet's book was published in 1946 and focused on experiences in two prisons: the Mettray Penal Colony (a progressive institution for young offenders famous for its lack of walls) and Fontevrault, an abbey-turned-prison in Anjou. Genet's book is notable for its eroticism and fantasy, particularly in relation to a character named Harcamone, a 16-year-old sentenced to death for murder.

In Henze's work, the poetic elements of the story are reimagined in instrumental terms. Genet once described The Miracle of the Rose as 'the most wretched human life described with the most beautiful words,' and the same can be said of Henze's music, both a technical and poetic transposing of Genet's words into musical shapes. Of the 16 instruments in the score, many represent specific characters in the story: the judge is heard on the trumpet, the priest on the horn and the lawyer on the trombone. The bass clarinet represents the poet himself and the higher clarinets Harcamone. At the end of the movement titled 'Chansons provençales', the squeal of an E flat clarinet marks the moment he is executed.

Andrew Mellor © 2019