**Thursday 22 October 2020**

**Liverpool Philharmonic Hall**

**Ensemble 10/10**

**Martyn Brabbins** *conductor*

**Jennifer Johnston** *mezzo soprano*

**Tippett** *Little Music for string orchestra*

**Dobrinka Tabakova** *Fantasy Homage to Schubert (for strings)*

**Pärt** *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten*

**Britten** *Phaedra: dramatic cantata for mezzo-soprano and small orchestra*

**Prologue**

In May,

in brilliant Athens, on my marriage day,

I turned aside for shelter from the smile

of Theseus. Death was frowning in an aisle –

Hippolytus! I saw his face, turned white!

**Recitative**

My lost and dazzled eyes saw only night,

capricious burnings flickered through my bleak abandoned flesh.

I could not breathe or speak.

I faced my flaming executioner,

Aphrodite, my mother’s murderer!

I tried to calm her wrath by flowers and praise,

I built her a temple, fretted months and days on decoration.

Alas, my hungry open mouth,

thirsting with adoration, tasted drouth –

Venus resigned her altar to my new lord.

**Presto**

*(to Hippolytus)*

You monster! You understood me too well!

Why do you hang there, speechless, petrified, polite!

My mind whirls. What have I to hide?

Phaedra in all her madness stands before you.

I love you! Fool, I love you, I adore you!

Do not imagine that my mind approved

my first defection, Prince, or that I loved

your youth, light-heartedly, and fed my treason with cowardly compliance, till I lost my reason.

Alas, my violence to resist you made

my face inhuman, hateful.

I was afraid to kiss my husband lest I love his son.

I made you fear me (this was easily done);

you loathed me more, I ached for you no less.

Misfortune magnified your loveliness.

The wife of Theseus loves Hippolytus!

See, Prince! Look, this monster, ravenous

for her execution, will not flinch.

I want your sword’s spasmodic final inch.

**Recitative**

*(to Oenone)*

Oh God of wrath,

how far I’ve travelled on my dangerous path!

I go to meet my husband; at his side

will stand Hippolytus. How shall I hide

my thick adulterous passion for this youth,

who has rejected me, and knows the truth?

Will he not draw his sword and strike me dead?

Suppose he spares me? What if nothing’s said?

Can I kiss Theseus with dissembled poise?

The very dust rises to disabuse my husband – to defame me and accuse!

Oenone, I want to die. Death will give

me freedom; oh it’s nothing not to live;

death to the unhappy’s no catastrophe!

**Adagio**

*(to Theseus)*

My time’s too short, your highness. It was I, who lusted for your son with my hot eye.

The flames of Aphrodite maddened me.

Then Oenone’s tears, troubled my mind; she played upon my fears,

until her pleading forced me to declare

I love your son.

Theseus, I stand before you to absolve

your noble son.

Sire, only this resolve upheld me, and made me throw down my knife.

I’ve chosen a slower way to end my life –

Medea’s poison; chills already dart

along my boiling veins and squeeze my heart.

A cold composure I have never known

gives me a moment’s poise. I stand alone

and seem to see my outraged husband fade and waver into death’s dissolving shade.

My eyes at last give up their light and see

the day they’ve soiled resume purity.