



Richard Watkins, horn

Thursday 28 January 2021, 1200

Programme

Britten	<i>Prologue from Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings</i>
Peter Maxwell Davies	<i>Sea Eagle</i>
Messiaen	<i>Des Canyons aux Etoiles (VI)</i>
Kvandal	<i>Salmetone</i>
Ian Wilson	<i>She passes... passes... passes by</i>
George Vass	<i>4 Capriccios</i>
Britten	<i>Epilogue from Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings</i>

There will be a Q&A with Richard Watkins after the performance.

Programme notes

The Prologue from Benjamin Britten's *Serenade* is probably the most well-known and performed music for solo Horn. It caused something of a controversy when it was written in 1943 as the hornplayer, Dennis Brain was instructed to play using natural harmonics. This resulted in some notes sounding 'out of tune' but was exactly the effect Britten had intended. When Brain was accused of playing out of tune Britten staunchly defended his

hornplayer but later confessed that he wished he had never written for this effect!

Salmetone (translated as Hymn Tune) was written by the Norwegian composer, Johan Kvandal. It is a simple yet effective piece and one can imagine the horn's soulful sound across the Norwegian fjords.

George Vass is a well-known and greatly admired advocate of contemporary music. He conducts many orchestras and is Director and founder of the renowned Presteigne Festival. Given that George is fearless in championing modern music it is perhaps refreshing that he wrote this charming set of pieces, I think, whilst a student at the Royal Academy of Music.

Four Capriccios

1. Horn Call
2. Capriccio Ritmico
3. Siciliana Lamentoso
4. Capriccio Precipitoso

Ian Wilson is an Irish composer, born in Belfast in 1964. I had been looking for a Solo Horn piece by an Irish composer to play at Festivals in Dublin and Clondeboy, near Belfast. So I was particularly delighted to find Ian's piece *She Passes...Passes...Passes By* from a poem by the Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa.

Like many horn pieces it incorporates many effects, such as stopping and unpitched sounds but without the piece degenerating into a 'sporting' contest. I feel the music mirrors the poetry creating an evocative effect.

As *She Passes* by Fernando Pessoa.

*When I am sitting at the window
Through the panes, which the snow blurs
I see the lovely images, hers, as
She passes...passes.. passes.. by*

*Over me grief has thrown its veil,
Less a creature in this world,
And one more angel in the sky.
When I am sitting at the window,
Through the panes, which the snow blurs
I think I see the image, hers
That's not now passing...not passing by*

Messaien's *Appel Interstellaire* is the sixth movement in his orchestral masterpiece *Des Canyons aux Etoiles*. The piece was commissioned to

celebrate the bicentenary of the United States Declaration of Independence. While preparing the piece Messaien was inspired by the colourful Bryce Canyon in Utah. The movements pay homage to the birdsong and natural landscape.

In this movement one can imagine looking up in the desert night to the stars. Musically it is a kaleidoscope of special effects to any composer, yet Messaien incorporates these and adds dramatic silences to create a spellbinding piece.

Peter Maxwell Davies wrote *Sea Eagle* for myself in 1983 as a result of our collaboration in his own ensemble The Fires of London. I joined the group in 1981 and was involved in many performances of his chamber operas *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* and *The Lighthouse*, both of which had a challenging role for the Horn. Max initially wrote a Study for Solo Horn but after a certain amount of persuasion wrote two more movements, It was whilst writing the second at his home in Orkney that he encountered a Sea Eagle outside his front door. This in itself was something of a surprise as the Sea Eagles were, at the time, an endangered species. There was a breeding programme on the Isle of Mull but this was many miles away, off the West coast of Scotland.

The piece explores the differing characteristics of the Sea Eagle from its majestic flight to a more aggressive, hunting nature.

We end as we began with Britten's Epilogue from the Serenade this time played from a distance away, off stage.

Richard Watkins, January 2021

Biography

Richard Watkins

Richard Watkins is one of the most sought-after horn players of his generation. He was Principal Horn of the Philharmonia Orchestra for twelve years, and is currently a member of the Nash Ensemble and a founder member of London Winds.

Richard Watkins has appeared at many of the world's most prestigious venues in the UK, Europe and the USA, and has worked with conductors such as Giulini, Sawallisch, Salonen, Slatkin, Sinopoli, Rozhdestvensky, Petrenko, Andrew Davis and Mark Elder.

His extensive discography includes recordings of the Horn Concertos by Mozart, Malcolm Arnold, Glière, Ethel Smyth and Colin Matthews, as well as Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante and Chamber Music for Horn by Schumann, Schubert and Poulenc. Recent releases include 'The Romantic Horn' with pianist Julius Drake for Signum, a Wigmore Live Disc of the Britten Canticles with Mark Padmore, Alexander Goehr's Horn Trio for NMC, Edward Gregson's Horn Concerto with the BBC Philharmonic for Chandos and 'Sea-Eagle' for NMC featuring works by British composers composed for Richard Watkins.

Richard Watkins has a long association with Aldeburgh Music, first performing Britten's Serenade with Sir Peter Pears in 1983. Since then he has appeared regularly as soloist and recitalist, performing Concertos by Colin Matthews and Oliver Knussen as well as performances of Britten's works for solo horn, the Serenade and Canticles. He has been actively involved with the Britten-Pears School, coaching and giving masterclasses. He has also recorded Britten's Serenade with Allan Clayton and Aldeburgh Strings and recently directed the inaugural Britten-Pears Brass Week.

In recital, Richard Watkins regularly performs with singers such as Allan Clayton, John Mark Ainsley, Ian Bostridge and Mark Padmore, and with pianists Barry Douglas, Julius Drake, Paul Lewis, Roger Vignoles and Ian Brown.

Closely associated with promoting contemporary music for the horn, Richard Watkins has given premières of concertos by Mark-Anthony Turnage, Maxwell-Davies, Osborne, Lindberg, Muldowney, Lefanu, Tansy Davies, Colin and David Matthews. Recent premières have included Colin Matthews' Horn Concerto and Trio, horn quintets by James MacMillan, David Matthews and Mark-Anthony Turnage and Horn Trios by Huw Watkins, Alexander Goehr and Gerald Barry.

Richard Watkins holds the Dennis Brain Chair of Horn Playing at the Royal Academy of Music where he is also a Fellow.

Forthcoming events

The Narcissistic Fish | Thu 28 January | 1500

Join Scottish Opera's Emerging Artists for a visceral exploration of the clash between class, gender and workplace pressure in 21st century Scotland

Ensemble Court Circuit | Thu 28 January | 1700

World premiere of Tansy Davies' *Grand Mutation* and works by Grisey and Ligeti

Richard Ingham and Pete Stollery | Thu 28 January | 2000

Music for saxophones and electronics by Pete Stollery, Denis Smalley and Richard Ingham

social sound | Thu 28 January | 2130

Join us online for a chat about the day's events in the company of featured artists

Rookh Quartet | Fri 29 January | 1200

Programme includes works written for the Rookh Quartet, exploring unusual sounds as well as capturing the soul of the horn

The Metalization of a Dream | Fri 29 January | 1500

Duncan MacLeod's *The Metalization of a Dream* is an open form sound-work responding to the dada and surrealist-inspired collages of artist Eduardo Paolozzi

We Ask These Questions Of Everybody | Fri 29 January | 1700

Operatic event sharing disabled people's experiences under austerity in the UK, performed by an exceptional cross-genre, all-disabled ensemble

Ensemble Court Circuit | Fri 29 January | 2000

Works by Philippe Hurel and Ravel

social sound | Fri 29 January | 2130

Join us online for a chat about the day's events in the company of featured artists

Promenade Concert | Sat 30 January | 1000

Join us for a winter themed discovery of new music for the whole family with Ruth Wall (harp), Richard Watkins (horn) and Richard Ingham (saxophone)

Gold.Berg.Werks | Sat 30 January | 1200

Karlheinz Essl's unusual take of Bach's *The Goldberg Variations* performed by Xenia Pestova Bennett (piano) and Ed Bennett (electronics)

Aberdeen | Sat 30 January | 1500

New collaboration between David Fennessy, Sonia Cromarty and Tim Cooper

Any Enemy & Brandon University New Music Ensemble | Sat 30 January | 1700

Unique live digital performance including new works specially commissioned for joint performance by the two ensembles

Richard Watkins, horn + Composer Conversation | Sat 30 January | 2000

Philip Cashian's *Scenes from the Life of Viscount Medardo* and discussion with Philip Cashian, Aileen Sweeney and Rylan Gleave

social sound | Sat 30 January | 2130

Join us online for a chat about the day's events in the company of featured artists

Listen Carefully | Sun 31 January | 1000

Siobhan Dyson's audio-visual work depicts a day in the life of an autistic person

Hebrides Ensemble *Diversions* | Sun 31 January | 1300

Works by Joe Stollery, Ben Teague, Rylan Gleave, Siobhan Dyson, Ben Lunn, Jason Hodgson and Lucy Hale

Available throughout the festival:

[Digital French Horn Exhibition](#)

Most of the performances will be available on our YouTube channel until 28th February. Please see our website for more information.

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