

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809)

Symphony No.44 in E minor 'Trauer' (c. 1771)

Despite its funereal nickname ('Trauer' means mourning), there's little that's sorrowful about Haydn's dramatic Symphony No.44. The composer gave the work its title late in his life, asking that its slow movement be played at his funeral. Death can have held few fears for him if he wanted this serene, untroubled movement to be his send-off.

Rather than expressing overwhelming sorrow, the 'Trauer' Symphony is a piece of great intensity and personal expression. Haydn wrote it while Kapellmeister (music director) at Prince Nicolaus Esterházy's glorious rococo palace Esterháza, whose splendour and artistic achievements rivalled those of the Austrian court itself, and whose orchestra comprised some of Europe's finest musicians. Nevertheless, Haydn felt somewhat marooned at the isolated castle, far from cosmopolitan Vienna. Yet this very isolation only served to stir the composer's creativity: as he himself wrote, *'I could make experiments and try new things with the orchestra. I was cut off from the world, and so I was forced to become original.'*

And original he certainly was in the 'Trauer' Symphony. At a time when a symphony was generally considered to be simply a piece of elegant entertainment for a cultured audience, Haydn turned it into a work of emotional and technical radicalism that looks forward to the drama of Beethoven and later Romantic composers.

High drama is there right from the opening of the E minor first movement, with its emphatic unison theme that's immediately followed by a gentle string melody – strong dynamic contrasts are a defining characteristic of the symphony. There are sudden explosions of activity, with the strings put through their paces in urgent, scurrying semiquavers, only for things to subside abruptly back into simple, slow-moving textures. The movement's bare-sounding final chords, from which Haydn omits the customary third of the scale, are austere yet resolute.

Austere is a word that could likewise be applied to the second-movement minuet and trio, also in E minor. Although these dance-derived forms usually come third in a traditional Classical symphony, Haydn shunts them to second place and creates a strange, bleak-sounding movement that's a long way from the ballroom floor. The minuet is a strict canon, with the lower strings doggedly copying their upper colleagues' melody but never quite catching up. The trio in E major blows in a sunny interlude of warm air before a repeat of the grimly determined minuet.

Things change completely in the ravishing slow movement, a lyrical E major melody for muted strings that exudes elegance and charm. It's back to E minor for the brief and speedy final movement, though, which seems intent on outdoing even the first movement's drama and intensity. Hardly pausing for breath, the movement heads at breakneck speed to its thrilling conclusion.

Luke Bedford (b. 1978)

Wonderful Two – Headed Nightingale

The title is taken from a 19th century poster advertising a pair of singing conjoined-twins: Millie and Christine McCoy. They were born in slavery in 1851, sold to a showman, and yet managed to escape the fate of many performers at freak shows and built a relatively normal life for themselves. Something of their story and the poster intrigued me, and I found some parallels with the music I was trying to write. From early on in the composition process I knew that the two soloists would be forced to play either identical or very similar music for most of the piece. I felt the tension between their combined, unified sound and their desire to break free from one another could be richly exploited. But I also knew that they would never be successful in tearing free. They would remain as locked together at the end of the piece as they were at the start.

The two basic harmonic ideas, from which everything else in the piece is created, are heard in the soloists' opening duet. The first is familiar: the bare fifths of open strings, while the second is altogether stranger: the flattened F played by the ensemble on its first entry. These two building blocks - fifths and quarter-tones - are matched in rhythmical terms, by a few short patterns, which are combined in constantly changing ways, so that the overall result is never predictable. As well as the soloists and strings, the piece is written for a pair of oboes and horns, just as Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante is. However in my composition, one of each of the wind instruments is tuned a quarter-tone lower, to enable them to play the flattened notes mentioned above.



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There are five definable sections to the piece. After the aforementioned duet between the soloists, the ensemble gradually enters and takes over the rhythmic impetus, whilst the soloists play a sustained line over the top. The soloists reach the point where they cannot sustain the line anymore, and they fall silent, leaving just a series of chords from the ensemble. Out of the remains of this, an expressive duet between the soloists emerges, supported by the strings in harmonics. Finally we are led back to the opening material, which brings the piece to a close.

Wonderful Two-Headed Nightingale was commissioned by the Scottish Ensemble with assistance from Britten-Pears Foundation, The Hope Scott Trust, The Idlewild Trust and PRS for Music Foundation."

Programme note by Luke Bedford

Luke Bedford

Luke Bedford was born in 1978 and studied composition at the Royal College of Music with Edwin Roxburgh and Simon Bainbridge.

His works range from chamber groups (e.g. the string quartet *Of the Air*), to ensemble, sometimes with voice (*Good Dream She Has* and *Or Voit Tout En Aventure*) and to full orchestra (*Outblaze the Sky, Wreathe*).

Tom Service wrote of *Or Voit Tout en Aventure*, that it was "one of the most outstanding pieces by any young composer I've ever experienced – music of brooding expressive intensity and charged with

that indefinable quality that makes a piece sound as if it was written out of sheer necessity."

Bedford was recently the recipient of a prestigious Paul Hamlyn Artists' Award, and in 2008 *Wreathe* won a British Composer Award. 2010 saw the world première of *At Three and Two* by the Hallé Orchestra.

Bedford is currently the first ever Composer in Residence at Wigmore Hall in London. Britten Sinfonia and the Scottish Ensemble have performed new commissions at the Hall during the 11/12 season.

William Alwyn (1905 – 1985)

Pastoral Fantasia (1939)

You couldn't tell from hearing it, but William Alwyn's *Pastoral Fantasia* is a wartime piece. Alwyn was completing the work just as war was declared in 1939, and its first orchestral performance – given by violist Watson Forbes and the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Adrian Boult – was broadcast in November 1941 on the BBC Light Programme as part of its classical concerts designed to raise the morale of British listeners.

Yet the piece is a world away from harrowing anguish or patriotic pomp. Instead, it's a nostalgic look back to an idyllic pastoral England long gone, with echoes of Vaughan Williams and Delius, yet whose yearning harmonies and rapturous solo line mark out Alwyn's individual voice.

The viola is placed centre-stage throughout, and Alwyn makes great use of its sonorous tone, frequently descending to its lowest register for rich, plangent melodies. After a hesitant orchestral opening, the soloist's first entry is an ascending modal theme against a drone in the strings, immediately defining the piece's sensuous sound world. After an episode in which the viola rhapsodises around a poignant folk tune, a faster-moving section pits a scurrying melody from the soloist against pizzicato basses. There's a more animated episode towards the end, with the soloist floating an expressive melody high above anxious tremolos in the strings, before the opening's hesitant music makes a brief reappearance and the viola leads the orchestra into serene silence.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791)

Sinfonia Concertante in E flat K. 364 (1779 – 1780)

Mozart hated his job as court musician to Prince-Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo, ruler of Salzburg, in the late 1770s. He knew it was far beneath his exceptional talents, yet in his early twenties he could no longer survive on his reputation as a child prodigy, and his recent travels to Europe's foremost musical centres – Vienna, Munich, Mannheim and Paris – hadn't brought him the prestigious (and lucrative) musical post he craved. Worse, during the trip, his mother had died in Paris in 1778.

In the *Sinfonia Concertante* K. 364, composed in Salzburg during the summer of 1779, Mozart rebelled against his stultifying employment, setting out to assert his individuality and confirm his prodigious abilities. But it wasn't through anger or sarcasm, which he was entirely capable of. Instead, it was through warmth, lyricism and an astonishing depth of expression. The work is probably the greatest of Mozart's string concertos, a sublime piece that's brimming over with melodic invention.

Both violin and viola had a personal significance for Mozart. His father Leopold was convinced that Wolfgang could make a world-class violinist if only he'd apply himself, but the younger man found himself increasingly drawn to the viola. It's likely that he wrote the viola part of the *Sinfonia Concertante* for himself to play, and he made sure he'd be heard. The piece is in E flat, but Mozart wrote the original viola part in D major and asked that the instrument be tuned up a semitone to sound in the correct key – thereby giving

it a particularly brilliant and sonorous tone, and ensuring that it would stand out against the orchestra.

The first movement is constructed on a grand scale, with almost an over-abundance of fine melodies – following their ghostly emergence from the orchestral introduction, the soloists have at least six of them. The cadenza for violin and viola together, which Mozart wrote out in full, serves to heighten tension rather than simply being a display of virtuosity.

The second movement, an *Andante* in C minor, is a long aria of breathtaking beauty, full of drooping phrases and yearning chromatic harmonies. It's been suggested that in it, Mozart was writing about the recent death of his mother, and its mood of unutterable poignancy would bear out that speculation. Another cadenza only serves to wring the last drops of emotion out of the movement's sorrowful themes, before the closing tutti can do nothing but subside into a resigned silence.

The brief final movement, a mischievous rondo, comes as quite a shock after the *Andante*'s high emotion, and quickly dispels the sense of tragedy. Its scampering opening theme quickly develops into one of impetuous triplets. There's no cadenza, but instead, Mozart pushes both soloists to the very top of their ranges. The violin soars to a stratospheric E flat, the highest note Mozart ever wrote for the instrument, before plummeting towards the work's resolute conclusion.

Programme notes by David Kettle