

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Lawrence Power with Thomas Adès: Fairy-Tale Dances

Friday 27 September 2024, 9pm

Queen Elizabeth Hall

Classical music has always had reinvention at its core. Throughout our programme, we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – capture that trailblazing spirit with works that broke the mould across the ages and brand-new approaches to timeless classics.

However you choose to experience the endlessly inventive world of classical music, we're so glad that you're doing it here with us. Welcome to Classical Music: Autumn/Winter 2024/25.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

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### Repertoire

**Purcell** Full Fathom Five from *The Tempest* arr. Thomas Adès 2'

**Thomas Adès** Berceuse No.2 from *The Exterminating Angel* arr. viola & piano 5'

**Britten** Waltz from Suite, Op.6 arr. viola & piano 6'

**Tippett** Interlude: Dreaming from *The Tempest* Suite 7'

**Dowland** If my complaints could passions move 3'

**Britten** Lachrymae (Reflections on a song of Dowland) for viola & piano, Op.48 12'

**Thomas Adès** Märchentänze for violin & piano 13'

*Interval*

**Berio** Naturale for viola, percussion & recorded voice 20'

**Stravinsky** Divertimento from *The Fairy's Kiss* arr. Stravinsky & Dushkin for violin & piano 21'

### Performers

Lawrence Power *viola, violin*

Thomas Adès *piano*

Paul Stoneman *percussion*

Jonathan Goddard *dancer*

*This performance lasts approximately 2 hours, including a 20-minute interval.*

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Thomas Adès – tonight's pianist, and one of Britain's most accomplished contemporary composers – is no stranger to *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's final play (or at least the last one the playwright wrote alone, it's thought) formed the basis for Adès' second opera, unveiled at the Royal Opera House in 2004. We won't be hearing anything from Adès' *The Tempest* this evening, admittedly, but the play forms one of the many connecting threads that weave tonight's panoply of pieces together –

alongside magic, singing and dancing, the raw authenticity of folk music, and affection for music of the past.

That final idea comes firmly to the fore in tonight's first piece, Adès' own 'realisation' of music from an earlier musical setting of *The Tempest*. It's not known for certain (and probably never will be) whether English Baroque composer Henry Purcell was really behind the music that transformed Shakespeare's play into an elaborate semi-opera in the late 17th century, in a drastically reworked version by poet and playwright (and later poet laureate) Thomas Shadwell. 'Full Fathom Five' is one of the work's musical highlights, sung by the spirit Ariel to the shipwrecked Ferdinand to inform him (misleadingly) that his father Alonso has drowned at sea. The piece's tolling bell sounds and its blurry, watery harmonies are prominent in Adès' version, originally conceived for countertenor and piano, with the viola tonight conveying the piece's characterful vocal line.

If *The Tempest* was Adès' second opera, *The Exterminating Angel* is his third, premiered in Salzburg in 2016, and based on the 1962 film of the same name by Luis Buñuel, a coruscating critique of upper-class entitlement. Adès extracted three Berceuses from the opera in 2018, specifically for the Viola Commissioning Circle, an ambitious project headed by Lawrence Power to expand his instrument's repertoire with new works by leading composers. The Berceuses showcase some of the opera's most overtly beautiful music, though if their title implies that they're calming lullabies, their music might suggest more in the way of fever dreams, even nightmares. No.2 was originally a love duet for the opera's doomed lovers Beatriz and Eduardo, its rich, decadent harmonies conjuring an atmosphere of both yearning and menace, and restless figurations propelling the piece to an uncertain close.

Benjamin Britten was just 21 when he wrote his Suite Op.6 for violin and piano in 1934–35, though he was quickly gaining an international reputation. So much so, in fact, that he yearned to study with arch-modernist Alban Berg in Vienna – though the authorities at the Royal College of Music, where he'd studied, warned his parents against allowing such a dangerous influence near their son. Britten's mother accordingly acted as chaperone during the young man's visit to Vienna, where he began work on

the Suite, to ensure no illicit meeting took place. All the same, Berg's influence might be detected in the Suite: it's a work that peers firmly outward from England across the Channel to more abrasive, progressive music. The Suite's concluding Waltz, which we hear tonight, bristles with volatile, unpredictable humour, and no shortage of flamboyant virtuosity for its string soloist.

We return to *The Tempest* for tonight's next piece. Michael Tippett originally composed 'Interlude: Dreaming' as part of incidental music for a 1962 production of the play at the Old Vic. The individual cues were transformed into a suite of instrumental and vocal pieces in 1995 by scholar and musician (and Tippett's long-time partner) Meirion Bowen. 'Interlude: Dreaming' is an appropriately elusive, rhapsodic piece that showcases the viola in often unaccompanied, folk-like melodies, but there are fleeting moments of darkness, too. Tippett grew increasingly fascinated with *The Tempest* following his work on the Old Vic production, and later – like Adès – produced his own operatic version. In Tippett's 1970 *The Knot Garden*, the God-like magician Prospero is transformed into the psychoanalyst Mangus, who attempts to ease the mental anguish of his patients by re-enacting Shakespeare's play with them.

Despite being separated by 350 years of British musical history, tonight's next two pieces belong together. London-born Renaissance composer, lutenist and singer John Dowland was a worldwide musical star in his day, and he was revered above all for music of deep melancholy, expressed most clearly in his best-known work, *Lachrimae, or Seven Tears*, a set of mournful dances for viols and lute. Perhaps confusingly, despite their title similarities, it's on the song 'If my complaints could passions move' from Dowland's 1597 *First Booke of Songes or Ayres* that Benjamin Britten based his own 1950 *Lachrymae*. Hearing Dowland's Renaissance original and Britten's 20th-century reimagining together makes clear the connections between them. Although Britten's work is in the conventional form of a theme and variations, he takes the unconventional approach of reversing their order, beginning with music that sounds very distant from Dowland's original, and growing increasingly close to it over the ensuing ten variations, only to conclude with a magical return to Dowland's music in its original form.

If Britten looked back with reverence and affection to the music of Dowland, Adès turned to the folk dances of his native England in the *Märchentänze* (literally, 'fairytale dances') he composed in 2020. Despite the German title, they're dances that offer sophisticated, sometimes surprising perspectives on very English-sounding source material – from the audacious transformations of the opening movement's blithe fiddle tune to the restlessly shifting harmonies and rhythms of the slower second movement. The third movement, titled 'A Skylark', offers a far crisper, more strongly defined portrait of the bird than Vaughan Williams' famous pastoral evocation, while the final movement returns us to bustling folk fiddling, though its unusual rhythms might fox anyone planning to tap their feet.

Italian composer Luciano Berio was one of the most prominent figures in the European post-war avant-garde, but he also took a decidedly sensual, theatrical perspective on creating music, and, like Adès, drew inspiration from the folk traditions of his native country in several pieces. His 1985 *Naturale* is one of them, and it collides together several elements: a complex line for solo viola (reworked from his earlier piece *Voci*) that Berio elaborated from Sicilian folk songs; an evocative percussion commentary; dance; and interruptions from the recorded voice of Sicilian street singer Peppino Celano, whom Berio had recorded in Palermo in 1968. There's something very moving about the interplay between the real-life viola player and the unseen, decades-old street singer, as though the live performer is somehow an intermediary between the raw authenticity of Sicilian song and the audience in a classical concert. Like Adès' *Märchentänze*, *Naturale* offers more perspectives on how classical music might treat and transform folk traditions, and how close (or distant) those two musical worlds really are.

Like Britten and Dowland in the earlier *Lachrymae*, Stravinsky paid overt homage to an adored earlier composer in his 1928 ballet score *The Fairy's Kiss* – in this case, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. He held cherished memories of having glimpsed the great man as a child at a St Petersburg concert, and drew on some of Tchaikovsky's songs and piano music in his ballet score, combining them with his own distinctive and sometimes more abrasive music – to the extent, he observed, that he even lost track of which was which. The ballet wasn't much of a success at its Paris premiere, but it clearly meant a lot to Stravinsky: he extracted an orchestral suite, then transformed that suite into tonight's Divertimento with the help of violinist (and friend) Samuel Dushkin. The ballet's storyline follows that of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*: the Divertimento's opening 'Sinfonia' draws on the work's introductory scene of a mother lost in a storm with a baby in her arms. The movement's more aggressive music surely hints at the appearance of the Ice Fairy herself, and her claiming of the boy as her own. By the second movement's 'Danses suisses', the boy is now a grown man, enjoying rustic dances at his engagement party. In the nervy, unsettled third-movement 'Scherzo', the Fairy leads our protagonist to a mill where his intended is waiting, while the two lovers dance in the closing 'Pas de deux', whose flashy, dashing conclusion shows clearly Stravinsky's famous rhythmic drive – although the Fairy will ultimately claim our hero as her own.

Programme notes © David Kettle, 2024

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#### Find out more

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