

Jack Sallimiras



Australian Chamber Orchestra

International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court

3–5 Oct 2019

Australian Chamber Orchestra
Richard Tognetti director & violin

Part of Barbican Presents 2019–20

aco Australian Chamber Orchestra

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Turn off watch alarms and phones during the performance.

Please don't ...

Take photos or make recordings during the performance.

Use a hearing aid?

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Programme produced by Harriet Smith; advertising by Cabbell (tel 020 3603 7930)

Australian Chamber Orchestra

International Associate Ensemble

at Milton Court

Thu 3 Oct

7:30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

Goldberg Variations

Stravinsky Three Pieces for string quartet

Thomas Adès The Four Quarters – Nightfalls

J S Bach, arr Richard Tognetti 14 Canons on a Goldberg Ground, BWV1087

interval 20 minutes

J S Bach, arr Bernard Labadie Goldberg Variations, BWV988

Australian Chamber Orchestra

Richard Tognetti director & violin

Erin Helyard keyboards

Fri 4 Oct

7:30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

Luminous

Music from Britten and Janáček to R.E.M. and Pēteris Vasks

Australian Chamber Orchestra

Richard Tognetti director & violin

Bill Henson photography, cinematography & editing

Lior vocals

Sat 5 Oct

7:30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

The lark ascending

Pēteris Vasks, arr Stefan Vanselow Viatore for 11 solo strings

Britten Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge

interval 20 minutes

Vaughan Williams The lark ascending

Schoenberg Verklärte Nacht

Australian Chamber Orchestra

Richard Tognetti director & violin

Guildhall Chamber Orchestra

Welcome

Welcome to this residency featuring our International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and its brilliantly innovative director Richard Tognetti.

They excel at putting together programmes and projects that allow us to experience music afresh and nowhere is that more vividly illustrated than in the first programme, performed on Thursday, in which one of the most iconic works in the repertoire – Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* – was presented in a new light, not least because we were hearing it in the orchestral arrangement by the great Canadian Baroque specialist Bernard Labadie. Prior to this, we had an ear-tingling array of pieces, beginning with Stravinsky immediately post-*The Rite* and continuing with a movement from Thomas Adès’s string quartet *The Four Quarters*, which, like the *Goldbergs*, is concerned with the passing of time, and night-time in particular. After this came one of Tognetti’s own arrangements – again closely related to the *Goldbergs*.

During last season’s residency the ACO presented one of its mesmerising audio-visual experiences – *Mountain*; for this season’s second concert the ACO and Tognetti joined forces with legendary Australian photographer and cinematographer Bill Henson for *Luminous*, with a soundtrack ranging from Purcell and Schnittke to R.E.M.

For the final concert, the ACO and Tognetti are joined by the Guildhall Chamber Orchestra, in a follow-up to the highly successful collaborations of 2017 and 2018. Again, the repertoire is typically wide-ranging, from the pastoral ethereality of Vaughan Williams’s *The lark ascending*, via the decadent harmonies of Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht*, to Britten’s *Frank Bridge Variations*; the concert begins in contemplative mood with Pēteris Vasks’s *Viatore*.

I hope you enjoy the residency.

Huw Humphreys
Head of Music

Jonathan Vaughan, Vice-Principal & Director of Music at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, writes:

Imagine taking a roller-coaster ride while playing a violin. That’s pretty much the awe-inspiring and thrilling experience students at Guildhall School encounter every time the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Richard Tognetti are in town.

Under Richard’s outstanding leadership the orchestra brings a visceral energy and drive to everything it performs. Every project to date

has inspired our students to new heights and emboldened them to participate in the ACO’s truly innovative interpretations with a gusto that floods their emotions and bursts onto the stage with youthful exuberance.

This project embodies all that is great about the landmark partnership between the Barbican and Guildhall School.

Saturday 5 October 7.30pm
Milton Court Concert Hall

Pēteris Vasks (born 1946),
arr **Stefan Vanselow** (born 1980)

Viatore for 11 solo strings

Benjamin Britten (1913–76)

Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge

interval: 20 minutes

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)
The lark ascending

Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951)
Verklärte Nacht

Australian Chamber Orchestra

Richard Tognetti director & violin

Guildhall Chamber Orchestra

Pēteris Vasks
(arr Stefan Vanselow)
Viatore for 11 solo strings

The music of Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks pursues themes such as the complex interaction between man and nature, and the beauty of life pitted against the imminent ecological and moral destruction of the world. Vasks writes that *Viatore* 'tells the story of a wanderer who arrives in this world, grows up in it, develops, falls in love, fills himself up and then departs. The journey is illuminated by the endless and starry universe.'

Viatore unfolds as a single movement and comprises two musical images: the theme of the traveller grows and develops throughout the composition; the theme of eternity, however, remains ageless and unchanging. *Viatore* is dedicated to Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, whom Vasks describes as his 'guiding light for many decades'.

Programme note © Bernard Rofe

Benjamin Britten
Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge

Frank Bridge (1879–1941) is today known as much for this musical tribute from his only composition student, Benjamin Britten, as for his own output. Bridge was something of an outsider, particularly when his music began to range outside traditional British pastoralism and to look towards the more acerbic, structured, overtly intellectual path that music was taking in Europe. Had Britten ended up with a more 'establishment', less intellectually curious teacher, he might never have attained the highly individual compositional voice that became so admired.

The pair met during the Norwich Festival in 1924, when Britten was 11. Young Ben Britten then began making occasional day trips up to London for composition lessons. He later recalled that there were two cardinal principles in Bridge's methods. 'One was that you should find yourself and be true to what you found. The other – obviously connected with the first – was his scrupulous attention to good technique, the business of saying clearly what was in one's mind.'

Britten went on to study at the Royal College of Music; after leaving he was hired to write the

music for some documentaries created by a film unit where he met colleagues who were to prove to be important influences, including the writer W H Auden and the conductor Boyd Neel. In May 1937 Neel approached Britten for a new work for his Boyd Neel Orchestra – but the stakes were high: it was to be premiered at the Salzburg Festival in August, so time was very tight.

Britten started work on his piece for Neel on 5 June 1937. It was essentially shaped within the next 10 days, and printed ready for rehearsals on 12 July – a remarkable achievement for even the most seasoned composer, let alone a young man.

It helped that Britten took as his starting point a theme by Frank Bridge: the principal idea from No 2 of *Three Idylls* for string quartet. Choosing to write a set of variations was a canny move too, for it meant that he was really composing a series of smaller works rather than trying to structure a single span. It also gave this young, almost unknown musician the opportunity to show his flair in a great variety of styles and forms.

Britten decided that each movement would represent something about his esteemed teacher. Although these didn't appear in the published score, they offer an interesting insight into the character of each variation, and useful signposts for the listener.

- 1 Introduction & Theme (Himself) [ie Frank Bridge]
- 2 Adagio (His depth)
- 3 March: Presto alla marcia (His energy)
- 4 Romance: Allegretto grazioso (His charm)
- 5 Aria italiana: Allegro brillante (His humour)
- 6 Bourrée classique: Allegro e pesante (His tradition)
- 7 Wiener Walzer: Lento – vivace (His enthusiasm)
- 8 Moto perpetuo: Allegro molto (His vitality)
- 9 Funeral march: Andante ritmico (His sympathy)
- 10 Chant: Lento (His reverence)
- 11 Fugue and Finale: Allegro molto vivace – molto animato – Lento e solenne (His skill and dedication)

As well as the principal theme, introduced by tender solo strings after a brisk introduction, the variations also allude to five of Bridge's more important scores, including the first Britten ever heard – *The Sea* – as well as *Enter Spring*, *Summer*, *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook* and the Piano Trio, all of which make their way cunningly into the Variations.

The premiere was a triumph, and the work was immediately taken up for performance by other ensembles. It's no overstatement to say this piece launched Britten's career. This must have been particularly satisfying for his first and best teacher, whose name is thus remembered when so many other great teachers are forgotten.

Programme note © Katherine Kemp

interval 20 minutes

Ralph Vaughan Williams **The lark ascending**

If Vaughan Williams had had pushier parents perhaps he might have been a child prodigy. The infant enthusiasm for composition was there, as demonstrated by charming if inept works such as *The Galoshes of Happienes*. Though he was a well-connected boy, related to both Josiah Wedgwood and Charles Darwin, not all of his family recognised his talent; one aunt famously described him as 'hopelessly bad' at music.

At the age of 7 he took up the violin, later calling it 'my musical salvation' in comparison to his struggles with the piano. During his schooldays at Charterhouse he swapped to the viola (favourite instrument of so many composers throughout history). Family pressure pushed him away from an orchestral career and into music and history studies at the Royal College of Music and at Cambridge. His composition teachers were stalwarts of the so-called English pastoral school: Charles Villiers Stanford, Hubert Parry and Charles Wood. He did however also undertake periods of private study with Ravel and Bruch.

All composers look for their own individual musical voice. Vaughan Williams worked out pretty early on that his heart lay in England's folkloric and musical history. It tied in well with his history studies; and, much like Bartók and Kodály in Hungary, Vaughan Williams and his friend Gustav Holst made numerous field trips around the country, collecting and notating folk songs from old villagers. The results of this extensive study can be heard in his music, which is often

a bit vague in terms of traditional tonality, but gains its unique flavour from the kind of modal harmonies associated with folk music.

The lark ascending brings together a modal, folk-like warmth and Vaughan Williams's deep understanding of string instruments. It was written in 1914 with a solo line intended for Marie Hall, a friend and popular concert violinist, originally with a piano accompaniment. The composer was inspired by an excerpt from *Poems and Lyrics of the Joys of Earth* by George Meredith (1828–1909), which begins:

*He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake ...*

Although too old to be conscripted, Vaughan Williams enlisted in the army during the First World War and served in Europe. Afterwards, he returned to composition and 'ran himself in' by revising works he'd already drafted. *The lark ascending* was one such, which he now orchestrated. Perhaps its timeless beauty and idyllic evocation of the British countryside was soothing to his post-war state of mind. Some critics (both then and now) accuse it of being old-fashioned. *The Times's* reviewer, writing after the first performance – in London, with the British Musical Society, Sir Adrian Boult and Marie Hall – possibly came closest to the truth: '[It] showed serene disregard of the fashion of today or yesterday.'

The lark ascending is subtitled 'A Romance for Violin and Orchestra' and this choice of name allows it to form its own shape without regard to musical convention. The main ideas or sections include cadenzas for the violin soloist (clearly meant to represent the rapid swooping, gliding and soaring of the lark), a warm modal tune which could have been based on a folk song, and another, jauntier melody which sits under the solo violin figurations. *The lark ascending* is one of Vaughan Williams's most popular works, remaining a favourite with audiences and violinists alike.

Programme note © Katherine Kemp

Arnold Schoenberg *Verklärte Nacht*

Schoenberg is usually revered as one of the chief musical intellects of the 20th century, having founded the Second Viennese School with his students Alban Berg and Anton Webern, developing a new technique of composition known as serialism. Many would argue that this is music generated by the mind rather than the heart. What a surprise, then, to encounter Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* ('Transfigured Night'), a work which some would argue is entirely emotional.

The title is taken from a poem by Richard Dehmel, who was a prominent *fin-de-siècle* German writer. His work incorporated an explicit approach to adult relationships that at the time was considered outrageous – his *Women and the World* volume of poetry from 1896 had something of the effect that D H Lawrence was to have on his contemporary literary audience. There was even a court case in 1897 where Dehmel was charged with blasphemy and immorality. Schoenberg and his set were much taken with Dehmel's poems, finding them very 'modern' and thrillingly inspirational.

The young composers in this group were, with the benefit of 21st-century hindsight, High Romantics. They were surrounded by the clearheaded formal structures of Brahms, but also – and in this case more tellingly – by the densely descriptive symphonic tone-poems of Liszt and Berlioz and their logical consequence: Wagner's 'total art work'. They longed to express their 'innermost nature' and believed that could only be done through their art.

Transfigured Night is a signpost in the history of music. Where other composers were using increasingly vast orchestral resources to depict dramatic narratives, Schoenberg opted to attempt something of the sort through a mere string sextet. In addition, he used no overt pictorial signposts – no major-third 'cuckoos' or storm-at-sea arpeggios. Instead, as he wrote in his notes to a 1950 recording, 'It does not describe some action or drama but is limited to depicting nature and expressing human feelings ... Listeners should be able, therefore, to forget the poem, which many

people nowadays may in any case regard as fairly repugnant.'

When he wrote those words he was living in America, at a time when married couples in Hollywood movies usually had separate beds (or one foot on the floor at all times, according to legend). Having already been uprooted from Hitler's Germany perhaps he was unwilling, even subconsciously, to offend the social mores of his new home – but it's also true that though he openly admired Dehmel, he hadn't wanted the poem printed at the first performance, half a century earlier, in Vienna in 1899.

The original scoring was for pairs of violins, violas and cellos; this was the version published by Universal Edition in 1899. In 1917 Schoenberg seems to have looked at the work again and in 1939 provided a string-orchestra version for the music publishers Edwin F Kalmus – but contract negotiations fell through and a version with further revisions (mostly addressing issues of balance) eventually went to the Associated Music Publishers in 1943.

Schoenberg wrote the first draft of this masterpiece of technique and expression in only three weeks, while on holiday with his friend Alexander von Zemlinsky, and Alexander's sister Mathilde, who was later to become Schoenberg's first wife. Was there an unusual emotional intensity about this time, perhaps heightened by frequent perusals of Dehmel's poetry? Schoenberg had been working on several songs with texts from the same volume when he turned to the wordless purity of his *Transfigured Night* setting, deciding language ran a poor second to the expressive powers of music.

Much of the poetry was autobiographical. The woman in the poem is probably Ida Auerbach, Dehmel's mistress, who was expecting a child with her husband. The drama of the situation – how will he respond? what will she do now? – has just as much relevance today as at any time through human history. It's possible that some readers will still find the woman's frank owning of her desires and actions mildly confronting, although these days we might be more questioning of her 'dutiful' childbearing.

The resolution of the poem comes in the man's reassurance, simple and loving, but touched with mysticism and wonder. The incurable romantics among us might dream about that sort of enchanted moonlit walk through the woods, where Nature could inspire our lover to speak words which create an alternative reality where everything is all right. The small earthbound touches (the directness of the woman's first words; the description of her hips, sometimes less charitably translated as 'ample') help defend it from charges of sentimentality.

Some may find the poem distracting and irrelevant. Schoenberg did pin his musical structure on it, but was just as interested in how clever he could be, modulating between the most remote keys, transforming and combining themes and motifs. If we didn't know the text at all, nor its musical representation (the violin solo for the woman's voice, the cello for the man, their intermingling in a climactic duet), *Transfigured Night* would still be hailed a masterpiece, because it is a beautiful and very well crafted work. Schoenberg's own notes on it conclude: 'All [themes] are reworked [in the long coda], as though to glorify the wonders of Nature, which have transformed this night of tragedy into a transfigured night.'

Programme note by Katherine Kemp © ACO

Transfigured Night

Two people walk through a bare, cold wood;
 The moon keeps pace as they gaze at it.
 The moon moves on above the high oaks.
 No wisp of cloud dims heaven's light into
 which the black treetops reach.
 A woman's voice speaks:

I am with child, and it is not yours.
 I walk in sin beside you.
 I have sinned grievously against myself.
 I despaired of finding happiness,
 yet still felt a painful longing
 for meaning in my life,
 for a mother's joys and duties; and so I sinned
 and,
 shuddering, let my sex
 be taken by a stranger,
 and even thought myself blessed for it.
 Now life has avenged itself,
 now I have met you, yes, you!

She walks on with stumbling steps.
 She gazes aloft; the moon keeps pace.
 Her sombre gaze is drowned in light.
 A man's voice speaks:

Let the child you have conceived
 be no burden to your soul.
 See how brightly the universe shines!
 Its glory casts a halo around all.
 We drift together on a cold sea,
 but there is a glow of inner warmth
 that flows from one of us into the other.
 That warmth will transfigure the stranger's child
 and you will bear it as if it were my own.
 You have transfused me with splendour,
 you have made a child of me.

He clasps her around her strong hips.
 Their breath kisses in the air.
 Two people walk through the high, bright night.

*Richard Dehmel (1863–1920), first published in
 German in 1896*

About the performers



Nic Walker

Richard Tognetti

Richard Tognetti director & violin

Richard Tognetti is Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra. He has established an international reputation for his compelling performances and artistic individualism.

He began his studies in his hometown of Wollongong with William Primrose, then continued with Alice Waten at the Sydney Conservatorium, and Igor Ozim at the Bern Conservatory, where he was awarded the Tschumi Prize as the top graduate soloist in 1989. Later that year he led several performances of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and that November was appointed as the Orchestra's lead violin and, subsequently, Artistic Director. He created the Huntington Festival in Mudgee, New South Wales, and was Artistic Director of the Festival Maribor in Slovenia from 2008 to 2015.

He performs on period, modern and electric instruments and his numerous arrangements, compositions and transcriptions have expanded the chamber orchestra repertoire and been performed throughout the world. As director and/or soloist, he has appeared with many of the world's leading orchestras and in 2016 was the Barbican Centre's first Artist-in-Residence at Milton Court Concert Hall. He has also composed for numerous film soundtracks, including the ACO's documentary films *Mountain*, *The Reef* and *Musica Surfica*.

Richard Tognetti was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2010. He holds honorary doctorates from three Australian universities and was made a National Living Treasure in 1999. He performs on the 1743 'Carrodus' Guarneri del Gesù violin, lent to him by an anonymous Australian private benefactor.

Australian Chamber Orchestra

The Australian Chamber Orchestra lives and breathes music, making waves around the world for its combination of explosive performances and brave interpretations. The ACO's programmes are steeped in history but always looking to the future, juxtaposing celebrated classics with new commissions, and adventurous cross-artform collaborations.

Since 1990 it has been led by Artistic Director Richard Tognetti and together they give more than 100 concerts across Australia each year. Whether performing in Manhattan, New York, or Wollongong, New South Wales, the ACO is unwavering in its commitment to creating transformative musical experiences.

Last season the ACO began a three-year London residency as International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court in partnership with the Barbican Centre, with which they share a commitment to present concerts that inspire, embolden and challenge audiences.

The Orchestra regularly collaborates with artists and musicians who share its ideology: from instrumentalists, vocalists and cabaret performers, to visual artists and film makers.

In addition to its national and international touring schedule, the ACO has an active recording programme across CD, vinyl and digital formats. Recent releases include *Water | Night Music*, the first Australian-produced classical vinyl for two decades, and the soundtrack to the acclaimed cinematic collaboration *Mountain*.

Guildhall School

The Guildhall School is a vibrant, international community of young musicians, actors and production artists in the heart of the City of London. Ranked as one of the top ten performing arts institutions in the world (QS World University Rankings 2019) and recently awarded top conservatoire in the Complete University Guide Music League Table 2020, the School is a global leader of creative and professional practice which promotes innovation, experiment and research, with over 1,000 students in higher education, drawn from nearly 60 countries around the world.

Guildhall School is also the UK's leading provider of specialist music training at the under-18 level

with nearly 2,500 students in Junior Guildhall and the Centre for Young Musicians, as well as a joint Creative Learning division with the Barbican.

Guildhall School is known in the music profession for intensive, dedicated training taught by renowned international teaching staff and through partnerships with the Barbican, London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Opera House and the Academy of Ancient Music. It offers state-of-the-art facilities, including a world-class concert hall and three theatres at Milton Court. Its distinguished list of music graduates includes Thomas Adès, Alison Balsom, Sa Chen, Sir James Galway, Tasmin Little, Zara McFarlane, Anne Sofie von Otter, Sir Bryn Terfel, Roderick Williams and Debbie Wiseman.

ACO UK

ACO UK is an independent, charitable company which supports the activities of the Australian Chamber Orchestra in the United Kingdom and provides opportunities for the British public to experience and engage with the ACO.

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Australian Chamber Orchestra

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Isha Crichlow
Raymond Brien

Bassoon

Madeleine Millar
Ruby Collins

Horn

Ruben Isidoro
Jacob Parker

Percussion

Aidan Marsden

*The lists of players were
correct at the time of
going to press*

Orchestra Manager
Jim Dean