

Sinfonia of London/John Wilson

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 9.20pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

William Walton *Scapino*

Maurice Ravel *Shéhérazade*

1 *Asie*

2 *La flûte enchantée*

3 *L'indifférent*

George Gershwin *An American in Paris*

Henri Dutilleux *Le Loup*

Tableau 1 *La baraque foraine: Les mystifications*

Tableau 2 *La chambre nuptiale: La Belle et la Bête*

Tableau 3 *La forêt d'hiver: Danse d'amour –*

Danse de mort

Maurice Ravel *Boléro* (original ballet version)

John Wilson's revived Sinfonia of London make their Barbican debut with a typically unorthodox programme.

The Italian theatrical tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* has given us enduring stock characters such as the clowns Harlequin and Pierrot, but rather less well-known is Harlequin's servant, Scapino, a rascal who arranges his master's amorous exploits – plus a few of his own. As John Wilson explains: 'We get the word "escapade" from scapino and I think that tells us a lot. Walton captures the two sides of Scapino's nature in his overture: the boisterous and the romantic. The central interlude which depicts Scapino a-wooing is some of Walton's most ravishing music.' Walton's comedy overture was written in 1941 for large orchestral forces, which were trimmed down for the revised 1950 version.

A rather more sinister character emerged in the *Arabian Nights* in the form of the Sultan Shahryar. He was in the habit of killing his brides each morning until he was outwitted by the Sultana Scheherazade, who distracted him with a new story each evening, cunningly ending on a cliffhanger. After 1,001 nights he was persuaded to kick his deadly habit. Ravel first turned to the subject in an overture of 1898, returning to it five years later in a highly evocative song-cycle, full of voluptuous contours and exotic colours. The poems he set were by Tristan Klingsor (the Wagnerian pseudonym of Léon Leclère): the two were both part of an artistic group called *Les Apaches*, at whose meetings Ravel first heard Klingsor's verses.

In 'Asie' Ravel sets the scene with shimmering strings and an oboe solo articulating quintessentially Eastern intervals, after which the mezzo-soprano languidly expresses the desire to see every exotic sight imaginable. Ravel the man could be reserved and enigmatic, but he relishes these seductive poems. As John Wilson puts it: 'Ravel rarely reveals his inner soul in his music; there is often a veneer of meticulously crafted artifice. That's not to say he isn't sincere – far from it – he's on record as saying the artificial is so much better than the real (or words to that effect). And he takes his fairy tales seriously and we are all the richer for it.' In 'La flûte enchantée', a young girl hears a bittersweet, languorous flute serenade, played by her lover, while in 'L'indifférent' it is unclear whether the desired youth with eyes 'as gentle as a girl's' is being addressed by a man or a woman – an ambiguity treated with gentle subtlety by Ravel.

Gershwin visited Paris in 1928, spending time with fellow composer Alban Berg and acquiring taxi-horns and Debussy scores to take home. *An American in Paris* was written the same year, a tone-poem described by Gershwin as: 'really a rhapsodic ballet – it is written very freely and is the most modern music I've yet attempted'. He added that his intention was 'to portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere'. John Wilson hails Gershwin's 'Good Tunes (tunes with a capital T), a personal, jazz-tinged harmonic language, an inventive sense of rhythm and an orchestral palette drawn from the sounds of his own time and place.

barbican

Dutilleux went to study in Paris in 1933 and developed a style that embraced influences from Ravel and Messiaen to jazz. Ravel's use of bitonality (two keys at once) in *Boléro* may have influenced Dutilleux's 1953 ballet score *Le Loup* ('The Wolf'), described by John Wilson as 'a wonderfully melodic, harmonically rich and thrillingly dramatic score. It falls right into your lap on first hearing and get better every time you listen to it. What more could you ask from a piece of music?'

Ravel's musical personality was formed, in his own words, from 'the clicking and roaring of my father's machines' (Joseph Ravel was an industrialist and inventor) and 'the Spanish folk songs sung to me by my mother', who was Basque. A bolero is a Spanish dance style which Ravel married with a mechanical aesthetic; he explained that 'my *Boléro* owes its inception to a factory' and longed to 'stage it with a vast industrial works in the background'.

Ravel's longtime friend Gustave Samazeuilh gave a vivid account of the conception of *Boléro*: 'I had the delightful experience of seeing Ravel in a yellow dressing gown and scarlet bathing cap playing the theme of *Boléro* with one finger and saying to me, "Mme Rubinstein has commissioned a ballet from me. Don't you think this tune has something insistent about it? I'm going to try and repeat it a good few times without any development while gradually building it up ..."'

The dancer Ida Rubinstein had asked Ravel to orchestrate Albéniz's great piano suite *Iberia* for a ballet – but copyright laws prevented it and Ravel instead produced an original composition, *Boléro*. Of the ballet version (much more of a rarity than the ubiquitous concert piece), John Wilson says: 'Compared to the standard edition of the concert version, the 1928 ballet score contains slightly altered note lengths in both the melody and the accompanimental figures, extra percussion (triangle and castanets) in the last statement of the tune and, most notably, a pair of drummers who alternate with each statement of the theme and are placed on either side of the orchestra.'

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Produced by the Barbican

Maurice Ravel

Shéhérazade

1 Asie

Asie, Asie, Asie,
Vieux pays merveilleux des contes de
nourrice,
Où dort la fantaisie comme une impératrice
En sa forêt tout emplie de mystère.

Je voudrais m'en aller avec la goëlette
Qui se berce ce soir dans le port,
Mystérieuse et solitaire,
Et qui déploie enfin ses voiles violettes
Comme un immense oiseau de nuit dans
le ciel d'or.

Je voudrais m'en aller vers les îles de fleurs,
En écoutant chanter la mer perverse
Sur un vieux rythme ensorceleur.

Je voudrais voir Damas et les villes
de Perse
Avec les minarets légers dans l'air;
Je voudrais voir de beaux turbans de soie
Sur des visages noirs aux dents claires;

Je voudrais voir des yeux sombres d'amour
Et des prunelles brillantes de joie
En des peaux jaunes comme des oranges;
Je voudrais voir des vêtements de velours
Et des habits à longues franges.

Je voudrais voir des calumets entre des
bouches
Tout entourées de barbe blanche;
Je voudrais voir d'âpres marchands aux
regards louches,
Et des cadis, et des viziers
Qui du seul mouvement de leur doigt qui
se penche
Accorde vie ou mort au gré de leur désir.

Je voudrais voir la Perse, et l'Inde, et puis
la Chine,
Les mandarins ventrus sous les ombrelles,
Et les princesses aux mains fines,
Et les lettrés qui se querellent
Sur la poésie et sur la beauté;

Je voudrais m'attarder au palais enchanté
Et comme un voyageur étranger
Contempler à loisir des paysages peints

Sur des étoffes en des cadres de sapin
Avec un personnage au milieu d'un verger;

Je voudrais voir des assassins souriant
Du bourreau qui coupe un cou d'innocent

Avec son grand sabre courbé d'Orient.
Je voudrais voir des pauvres et des reines;
Je voudrais voir des roses et du sang;
Je voudrais voir mourir d'amour ou bien
de haine.

Asia

O Asia, Asia, Asia,
magic land of nursery tales,

where fantasy, like an empress, sleeps
in her forest full of mystery.

I would like to set sail with the schooner
that lies rocking in the harbour this night.
Mysterious and alone,
it unfurls at last its purple sails
like a huge night-bird in
the golden sky.

I would like to set sail for the isles of flowers,
listening to the song of the brutal sea
to an ancient spell-like beat.

I would like to see Damascus and the towns
of Persia,
their dainty minarets tall in the air;
I would like to see fine turbans of silk
above black faces with gleaming teeth;

I would like to see eyes dark with love
and pupils bright with joy
against skins colourful as oranges;
I would like to see velvet clothes
and fringed dresses.

I would like to see pipes in
mouths
encircled by white beards;
I would like to see greedy merchants with
scheming eyes,
cadis and viziers
who with a snap of their fingers

dispense at will life or death.

I would like to see Persia, India and
China too,
pot-bellied mandarins beneath parasols,
princesses with slender hands
and scholars debating
poetry and beauty;

I would like to linger in the enchanted palace
and like a foreign wayfarer
contemplate at my ease landscapes daubed

on canvases in frames of pine,
a lone person in an orchard's midst;

I would like to see assassins smiling
as the executioner slices off an innocent's
head
with the great curved sabre of the East.
I would like to see paupers and queens;
I would like to see roses and blood;
I would like to see men die of love or of hate.

Et puis m'en revenir plus tard
Narrer mon aventure aux curieux de rêves
En élevant comme Sindbad ma vieille tasse
arabe
De temps en temps jusqu'à mes lèvres
Pour interrompre le conte avec art ...

2 La flûte enchantée

L'ombre est douce et mon maître dort,
Coiffé d'un bonnet conique de soie
Et son long nez jaune en sa barbe blanche.

Mais moi, je suis éveillée encor
Et j'écoute au dehors
Une chanson de flûte où s'épanche
Tour à tour la tristesse ou la joie,

Un air tour à tour langoureux ou frivole,
Que mon amoureux chéri joue,
Et quand je m'approche de la croisée
Il me semble que chaque note s'envole
De la flûte vers ma joue
Comme un mystérieux baiser.

3 L'indifférent

Tes yeux sont doux comme ceux d'une fille,
Jeune étranger,
Et la courbe fine
De ton beau visage de duvet ombragé
Est plus séduisante encor de ligue.

Ta lèvre chante sur le pas de ma porte
Une langue inconnue et charmante
Comme une musique fausse ...
Entre!
Et que mon vin te reconforte ...

Mais non, tu passes
Et de mon seuil je te vois t'éloigner
Me faisant un dernier geste avec grâce,
Et la hanche légèrement ployée
Par ta démarche féminine et lasse ...

*Tristan Klingsor (Léon Leclère, 1874–1966),
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Durand SA, Paris/United Music Publishers Ltd*

And then later, homeward bound,
my tale narrate to those who thrive on dreams,
raising like Sinbad my old
Arab cup
to my lips now and then
in an adroit interruption of my tale ...

The Enchanted Flute

The shade is cool and my master sleeps,
a cone-shaped cap of silk upon his head,
his long yellow nose thrust in his white beard.

But I, awoken once more,
hear from afar
a flute song spreading
in turn sadness and joy,

a tune, now languorous, now shallow,
that my dear love plays,
and when I near the casement
each note seems to fly
from the flute to my cheek
like a mysterious kiss.

The Indifferent One

Your eyes are as gentle as a girl's,
O unknown youth,
and the soft curve
of your exquisite face shaded with down
is in its contours more seductive still.

On my doorstep your lips sing
in a strange yet beguiling tongue,
like music out of tune ...
Enter!
Let my wine refresh you ...

But no, you go,
and from my threshold I watch you leave,
a last graceful wave in my direction,
your hips slightly swaying
in your languid, feminine gait ...

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Performers

John Wilson conductor

Sinfonia of London

violin I

Charlie Lovell-Jones
John Mills
Thomas Gould
Ciaran McCabe
Andrew Harvey
Charles Mutter
Beatrice Philips
Dan-Iulian Drutac
Jack Greed
Julia Ungureauu
Marciana Buta
Sam Staples
Steven Wilkie
David Tobin

violin II

Michael Trainor
Jens Lynen
Victoria Gill
Charis Jenson
Julián Gil Rodriguez
Zahra Benyounes
Michael Jones
Harry Kneeshaw
David Shaw
Juliette Roos
Jenny King
Greta Mutlu

viola

Ben Newton
Joel Hunter
Lydia Northcott-Lowndes
Edgar Francis
Matthew Quenby
Amy Thomas
Asher Zaccardelli
George White
Kim Becker

cello

Jonathan Aasgaard
Tim Lowe
Steffan Morris
Jessie Ann
Richardson
Tim Posner
William Clark-Maxwell
Hugh Mackay
Yoanna Prodanova

double bass

Philip Nelson
David Stark
Edward Francis-Smith
Sam Becker
Harry Atkinson
Evangeline Tang

flute

Charlotte Ashton
Fred Paixao
Diomedes Demetriades

oboe

Tom Blomfield
Alex Hilton

cor anglais

Peter Facer

clarinet

Christopher Richards
James Gilbert

bass clarinet

Katy Ayling

bassoon

Daniel Jemison
Dominic Tyler

contrabassoon

Rebecca Koopmans

alto saxophone

Howard McGill
Robert Buckland

tenor saxophone

Mark Crooks

horn

Alex Wide
Jonathan Quintrell-Evans
Andrew Littlemore
Flora Bain
Elise Campbell

trumpet

James Fountain
Matthew Williams
Toby Street
Rebecca Crawshaw

trombone

Peter Moore
Matthew Lewis
Becky Smith

bass trombone

James Buckle

tuba

David Kendall

timpani

Matthew Hardy

percussion

Paul Stoneman
Richard Cartlidge
Owen Gunnell
Tim Gunnell
Jess Wood

drums

Justin Quinn

harp

Sally Pryce
Daniel de Fry

piano/celesta

Ben Dawson

managing director

Rosenna East

orchestra manager

Declan Kennedy

tour management by Intermusica

chief executive

Stephen Lumsden

director/head of international touring

Peter Ansell



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