

# Mullova Ensemble: Transfigured Night

**Start time:** 7.30pm

**Approximate end time:** 8.50pm, with no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

## Programme

**Jasmine Morris**

*Transfigured Night*

1. Two People Walk

**Johann Sebastian Bach** 'Double' (from the Allemande) from Partita No 1 in B minor for solo violin

**Claude Debussy** *Clair de lune* (arr Kang for two violas)

**Richard Strauss** *Waldeseligkeit* Op 49 No 1 (arr Barley for quartet)

**Jasmine Morris**

*Transfigured Night*

2. A Woman's Voice Speaks

**Johann Sebastian Bach** 'Adagio' from Sonata No 1 in G minor for solo violin

**Béla Bartók** 'Ruthenian Song', 'Cradle Song', 'Teasing Song', 'Sorrow' and 'Ruthenian Round Dance'  
from *44 Duos for Two Violins*

**Jasmine Morris**

*Transfigured Night*

3. A Man's Voice Speaks

**Improvisation** cello

**Improvisation** viola and cello

**Jasmine Morris**

*Transfigured Night*

4. Dark Gaze

**Leoš Janáček** 'Moderato' from String Quartet No 2, *Intimate Letters*

**Jasmine Morris**

*Transfigured Night*

5. There's a Glow Around Everything

**Arnold Schoenberg** *Verklärte Nacht*

**Tonight's concert from the Mullova Ensemble has been some quarter century in the making; it offers a typically provocative rethinking of Schoenberg's great Romantic sextet *Verklärte Nacht*, heard in an entirely fresh setting.**

Playing this piece with my wife Viktoria Mullova has been in the pipeline for a good 25 years – a dream come true – but it had to wait a long time for the right context; more of that in a moment. When Richard Dehmel wrote his poem *Verklärte Nacht* ('Transfigured Night') in 1896, a youthful and passionate Arnold Schoenberg – still only in his early twenties – was moved to compose a response in the form of a string sextet that has become one of the iconic works of the repertoire. In the words of Schoenberg's biographer, the plot of the poem goes like this:

'A man and a woman walk in the woods at night; she confesses that in her desire to have a child she had sinned by giving herself to a stranger whom she didn't love; now she is pregnant but, having found you", the man she is with and whom she loves, she is full of remorse. Her lover, however, generously tells her that their love will "transfigure" the child, which will be his as well as hers. The idea in the poem was considered scandalous in the dying days of 19th-century Vienna.'

*Verklärte Nacht* is beloved by so many string players (a combination of its wonderful string writing and the infectious freedom of expression; the abandon that maybe only a young genius could find) and it has been a favourite of Viktoria's and mine since we were both in our twenties, before we met.

After the pandemic I began to dream about this piece again, wondering how to present it in a way that would feel satisfying – I wanted it to be the culmination of an evening, something presented to an audience who were already in a changed state from the bustle of normal life outside the concert hall.

barbican

My thoughts turned to finding a way to transport the audience ... maybe going down the avenue of something semi-theatrical, using lighting and projections to take the audience into the forest at night with its full moon ... something (after all the craziness of Covid) that was comforting, consoling, with love at its centre.

So the idea formed of a sequence of small pieces before the Schoenberg, with a seventh performer to represent the force of love, the transfiguring power from the poem – a character like a spirit who would move around the stage and open the space for the mysticism of the transfigured night. We had been completely blown away by dancer Ching-Ying Chien's award-winning virtuosity and depth of expression in Akram Kahn's epic *Until the Lions*, so were thrilled when she agreed to take part, dancing a new choreography by Joshua Junker, a rising star of the Royal Ballet.

I had been impressed by the music of young Japanese/British composer Jasmine Morris and commissioned five short pieces for electronics that would follow the five stanzas of the poem, acting as structural columns in the first part of the concert. In between these we could then programme music that reflected some aspect of either Dehmel's poem or of Schoenberg's response to it.

We start with Bach on solo violin, representing the veiled purity of the moonlit night; Debussy's classic *Clair de lune* ('Moonlight'), performed by our two virtuosic viola players under the projection of the rising full moon; then an arrangement of Richard Strauss's *Waldseligkeit* ('Woodland rapture'), an intimate love song set in a nocturnal forest; more solo Bach; then violin duos arranged from songs collected by Bartók in the villages of Hungary and Ruthenia, presenting another kind of music made in close connection with nature; some free improvisation illuminating how the performers feel onstage in the moment they play with Ching-Ying; and a movement from Janáček's extraordinary Second Quartet, *Intimate Letters*, a piece that matches *Verklärte Nacht* in its wild expression of ecstatic love.

We have been joined in this project by some outstanding artists: my long-time collaborator Nick Hillel, director of the fabulous Yeast Culture, creators of very high-class visuals for theatre, dance and concerts; and renowned lighting designer Sander Loonen. The set-up costs have been considerable, so enormous thanks are due to the Marchus, Coln, Fidelio, Backstage and Leigh Family Trusts, as well as an anonymous donor, for making this project possible. We are also indebted to Alicia Carey and Hawkwood College in Stroud for their generosity in providing a residency where the ideas were developed in 2022.

© Matthew Barley

**Richard Dehmel** (1863–1920)

**Verklärte Nacht** (Transfigured Night, 1896)

In 1899 Arnold Schoenberg, inspired by this poem, wrote his eponymous masterpiece for string sextet. The subject matter shocked conservative Vienna, but its message, of tolerance and the power of love to transform and dissolve obstacles and barriers, is as important today as it was then.

Two people walk through a bare, cold grove;  
the moon glides above them, they gaze upward.  
The moon glides over tall oaks; not a wisp of cloud  
dims the heavenly radiance  
into which the black points of the branches reach

A woman's voice speaks:

I bear a child, and it is not yours,  
I walk in sin beside you,  
I have gravely offended against myself.  
I no longer believed in happiness,  
yet still yearned painfully  
for a full life, for a mother's joy,  
for duty; and so I grew reckless,  
and shuddering, I yielded myself  
to a stranger, embraced him  
and even blessed myself for doing so.  
Now life has taken its revenge:  
now I have met you – ah you.  
She stumbles on her way.  
She looks up; the moon glides above.  
Her dark gaze drowns in light.

A man's voice speaks:

The child that you conceived –  
let it not burden your soul,  
oh, look how bright the universe gleams!  
There is a radiance all around;  
you drift with me on a cold sea,  
but an inner warmth glimmers  
from you in me, from me in you.  
The warmth will transfigure the stranger's child,  
  
you will bear the child, as if it were mine;  
you have filled me with the radiance,  
you have made me a child myself.  
He holds her around her strong hips.  
Their breath mingles in the air.  
Two people walk through the soaring, clear night.

Translation © Richard Stokes

## Performers

### **Mullova Ensemble:**

**Viktoria Mullova** violin

**Lisa Rieder** violin

**Nils Mönkemeyer** viola

**Kinga Wojdalska** viola

**Matthew Barley** director/cello

**Peteris Sokolovskis** cello

**Ching-Ying Chien** dancer

**Joshua Junker** choreographer

**Nick Hillel, Yeast Culture** projections

**Sander Loonen** lighting designer/technician

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