



CBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Britten & Tchaikovsky
Symphony Hall
Wednesday 17 April 2024,
7.30pm

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BRITTEN & TCHAIKOVSKY

Concert programme £4



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INTRODUCTION

A journey into the realm of dreams. Composers often delve into the subconscious to draw inspiration for creating transcendent sonic landscapes. Tonight's programme is all about dreams, desires and illusions: three distinctly different yet interconnected compositions, exploring the profound depths of the human psyche.

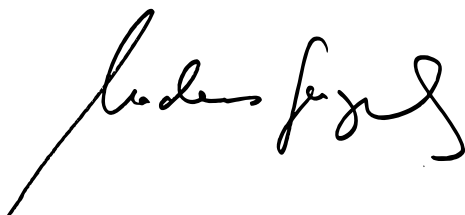
"Dreams" by Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir invites listeners into a sonic dreamscape characterized by delicate textures, shimmering harmonies, and expansive atmospheres. In a multidimensional space, where every group of instruments have a personal story to tell, Anna evokes the mysterious and elusive nature of dreams, transporting us into a realm where reality merges with imagination. The role of the conductor is unusual: first I need to conduct in the traditional sense, and at certain points my role is merely to inspire and encourage the musicians by my motionless presence.

In contrast, Britten's "Les Illuminations" enlightens the vivid imagery and surrealistic themes found within Arthur Rimbaud's visionary verses, presented by the powerful yet eloquent voice of Ian Bostridge. Lush string sound and emotive melodies blur the line between real life and the subconscious world of dreams. The music unfolds like a series of luminous vignettes, each painting a lively portrait of the dreamer's innermost thoughts and desires.

Tchaikovsky's 1st Symphony, subtitled "Winter Daydreams," transports us back into a wintry landscape tinged with nostalgia and yearning. Through sweeping melodies and dramatic orchestral gestures, it depicts the endless, snow-covered and frosty Russian countryside, evoking a sense of introspection and longing. And at the same time, warms our hearts by reminding us of our happiest childhood memories about the enchanting beauty of winter.

I invite you to a journey into the depths of the human psyche, where reality intertwines with fantasy, and the boundaries between dreams and waking life are undefined.

Have a dreamy and illuminating evening!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gergely Madaras', written in a fluid, cursive style.

Thorvaldsdottir, Dreaming, 17mins

Britten, Les Illuminations, 21mins*

- I. Fanfare: Maestoso (poco presto)
- II. Villes: Allegro energico
- IIIa. Phrase: Lento ed estatico
- IIIb. Antique: Allegretto, un poco mosso
- IV. Royauté: Allegro maestoso
- V. Marine: Allegro con brio
- VI. Interlude: Moderato ma comodo
- VII. Being Beauteous: Lento ma comodo
- VIII. Parade: Alla marcia
- IX. Départ: Largo mesto

Interval

Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.1 (Winter Daydreams), 45mins

- I. Allegro tranquillo
- II. Adagio cantabile ma non tanto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro scherzando giocoso
- IV. Finale: Andante lugubre - Allegro moderato - Allegro maestoso

Gergely Madaras, Conductor

Ian Bostridge, Tenor*

Rita Castro Blanco, Assistant Conductor

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To ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the performance, please make sure your mobile phone is set to silent.

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BRITTEN & TCHAIKOVSKY

The frosty magic of the Russian winter inspired Tchaikovsky's First Symphony: music so tuneful, and so fresh, that you can almost see your breath in the air! Anna Thorvaldsdottir dreams of the vast stillness of Icelandic nature. And the great Ian Bostridge – possibly Britain's finest living tenor – leads a wild parade through Britten's shimmering, magical musical dreamscape. This promises to be a truly gripping evening...

Anna Thorvaldsdottir (b. 1977)

DREAMING

Anna Thorvaldsdottir's notes and instructions to musicians are often as poetic as the works themselves. In several of her scores, she writes 'When you see a long sustained pitch, think of it as a fragile flower that you have to carry in your hands.' Often, the music which follows can have an urgency, a sense of extreme anxiety in the face of pending crisis such as 2021's *Catamorphosis*. Her first major orchestral work, *Dreaming* (composed in 2008) is less apocalyptic and considerably more serene. But its beauty is stark, rather than consoling. It offers an invitation to be both awestruck at the ongoing cycle of nature, and mindful of its flower-like fragility. As well as musical themes (predominantly those which gently rise and fall), the sounds the instruments produce often resemble moans or cries, or the simple act of inhaling and exhaling. In the central section the texture thickens to create an atmosphere of great melancholy.

Thorvaldsdottir notes the following list in the score to *Dreaming*:

listen
flow free
individually
embrace
listen

She adds that 'the orchestra becomes an ensemble of soloistic events'. Effectively, the instrumentalists, and even the conductor, become solo travellers in the musical landscape; elements of a single, dreaming consciousness, but free-ranging in their own time zones. The conductor, rather than beating time throughout, gradually becomes an observer, simply listening to the emerging sounds. By the end, their presence is one of support around which to coalesce, rather than the usual role of holding the ensemble together with the baton. The Thorvaldsdottir encourages a meditative space for the instrumentalists, occasionally punctuated by disquiet, and for the audience as well: 'A quiet soundworld is born from silence...Time is redundant. The cycle continues.'

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

LES ILLUMINATIONS

- I. Fanfare: Maestoso (poco presto)
- II. Villes: Allegro energico
- IIIa. Phrase: Lento ed estatico
- IIIb. Antique: Allegretto, un poco mosso
- IV. Royauté: Allegro maestoso
- V. Marine: Allegro con brio
- VI. Interlude: Moderato ma comodo
- VII. Being Beateous: Lento ma comodo
- VIII. Parade: Alla marcia
- IX. Départ: Largo mesto

At first glance, Britten and the French poet Rimbaud make an unlikely pair. Take a look at their respective teenage years. Britten was born in Suffolk to a middle-class family, took himself neatly and precociously to music college aged 16, enjoyed sponge pudding and custard and was rarely seen without a tie. By contrast the 16-year-old Rimbaud frequently ran away from home, got drunk and wrote rude poetry, and shortly after launched into a torrid affair with fellow poet Paul Verlaine, fuelled by hashish and opium. However, while outwardly wildly different, Britten's own subversiveness was often to be found boiling under the surface – even if sometimes needing encouragement to break free. WH Auden introduced Britten to Rimbaud's vivid, proto-surreal poetry and Britten wrote something quite unique in response. It was not the first time he had set French words – one of his teenage experiments had been *Quatre chansons françaises* for voice and orchestra – but it was the first time he'd let rip on such exotic scenes: castles of crystal, silver chariots, a 'Paradise of mad grimaces'.

It was composed for high voice (originally soprano, but often performed by tenors) and string orchestra and produced over several months in 1939. By this stage a veteran of several works for string orchestra, including the very successful *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, Britten was experienced in drawing out a great variety of colours from string instruments. The orchestra plays

"The orchestra plays fanfares in the opening, strums like a guitar in 'Antique', melts into sumptuousness in 'Being Beateous' and frequently gives way to exquisite solo spots."

fanfares in the opening, strums like a guitar in 'Antique', melts into sumptuousness in 'Being Beateous' and frequently gives way to exquisite solo spots. Rimbaud's texts are mostly prose, apart from 'Marine,' but Britten holds them together with a refrain which appears three times (and in three different moods): 'J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage'. The singer acts as a kind of host to the bizarre scenes that follow – think of the suave but sinister MC in *Cabaret* – ranging in tone from declamatory to gentle to somewhat eerie.

Throughout, perhaps sheltered by the non-English language here, Britten seems to be letting his hair down and channelling some of Rimbaud's free-wheeling spirit. There is an unhinged quality not often heard in his vocal works, notably in 'Marine' and 'Parade'. But there are also moments of tenderness that are bold indeed for the times. 'Being Beateous,' the most soaringly erotic song of the group, is dedicated to P.N.L.P, Peter Neville Luard Pears, with whom Britten was just embarking on a 37-year long relationship.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

SYMPHONY NO. 1 (WINTER DAYDREAMS)

- I. Allegro tranquillo
- II. Adagio cantabile ma non tanto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro scherzando giocoso
- IV. Finale: Andante lugubre -
Allegro moderato - Allegro maestoso

Tchaikovsky was often beset by self-doubt but generally managed to compose at a furious pace. However, he found his first Symphony something of a mountain to climb. Having completed a version of it in 1866, which was crushingly poorly received, he worried at it for years afterwards. Even while writing the first draft, he experienced appalling physical and psychological stress. His brother Modest later wrote 'No other work cost him such effort and suffering... As a result of this exceptionally hard work he began to suffer from insomnia, and the sleepless nights paralyzed his creative energies.' Tchaikovsky also had hallucinations and numbness across his body. The composer did, however, feel that suffering was, or even should be, part of the artistic process. And despite finding that period profoundly difficult he later wrote fondly of his First Symphony: 'I still nourish a weakness for it, because it was a sin of my sweet youth'.

Tchaikovsky had recently been appointed to the Moscow Conservatory and found that his colleagues were somewhat conservative with regard to musical form. Part of the reason Tchaikovsky met with such disapproval was his apparently disrespectful attitude to the almost sacred form of 'Symphony'. The first two movements have poetic titles ('Dreams of a Winter Journey' and 'Land of Desolation, Land of Mists') and are more like tone poems than conventional symphony movements. The opening 'Allegro', after a somewhat shivery start, is a richly scored adventure in melody and texture, with beautifully-

paced recurrences of the principal themes, often to very dramatic effect. (There is an intriguing moment for the horn section after about four minutes which seems to anticipate the famous 'Dance of the Flowers' in the *Nutcracker* more than thirty years later). The slow movement demonstrates Tchaikovsky's remarkable ability – which would bring him so much admiration later on – to create musical magic out of endless, soaring melody. The opening twelve-bar theme generates the material for most of the rest of this atmospheric, 'misty' movement. For the third movement, Tchaikovsky thriftily recycled an early piano sonata, producing a lighter-than-air Scherzo. The finale, after a mournful, folk-like start, builds into a majestic, sometimes boisterous celebration for the full orchestra. The more sombre, 'wintery' mood returns occasionally, as if recalled from a distance. But the final bars dispel such chilliness with a rambunctious, all-guns-blazing conclusion. Relief for the composer, perhaps, that he eventually got to the end.

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CABINET CARD PORTRAIT OF PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1888).
EMILE REUTLINGER, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

BRITTEN: LES ILLUMINATIONS (1939)

I. FANFARE.

J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage.

II. VILLES.

Ce sont des villes! C'est un peuple pour qui se sont montés ces Alleghanys et ces Libans de rêve! Des chalets de cristal et de bois se meuvent sur des rails et des poulies invisibles. Les vieux cratères ceints de colosses et de palmiers de cuivre rugissent mélodieusement dans les feux... Des cortèges de Mabs en robes rouges, opalines, montent des ravines. Là-haut, les pieds dans la cascade et les ronces, les cerfs tettent Diane. Les Bacchantes des banlieues sanglotent et la lune brûle et hurle. Vénus entre dans les cavernes des forgerons et des ermites. Des groupes de beffrois chantent les idées des peuples. Des châteaux bâtis en os sort la musique inconnue... Le paradis des orages s'effondre. Les sauvages dansent sans cesse la fête de la nuit.

Quels bons bras, quelle belle heure me rendront cette région d'où viennent mes sommeils et mes moindres mouvements?

IIIA. PHRASE

J'ai tendu des cordes de clocher à clocher; des guirlandes de fenêtre à fenêtre; des chaînes d'or d'étoile à étoile, et je danse.

I. FANFARE

I alone hold the key to this savage parade.

II. TOWNS

Thes are towns! It is for the inhabitants of towns that these dream Alleghanies and Lebanons have been raised. Castles of crystal and wood move on rails and invisible pulleys. Old craters, encircled with colossal statues and palms of copper, roar melodiously in their fires... Corteges of Queen Mabs in robes red and opaline, climb the ravines. Up there, their hoofs in the cascades and the briars, the stags give Diana suck. Bacchantes of the suburbs weep, and the moon burns and howls. Venus enters the caves of the blacksmiths and hermits. Groups of bell-towers sing aloud the ideas of the people. From castles build of bones proceeds unknown music... The paradise of the thunders bursts and falls. Savages dance unceasingly the Festival of the Night.

What kindly arms, what good hour will resort to me those regions from which come my slumbers and the least of my movements?

IIIA. PHRASE

I have hung ropes from bell-tower to bell-tower; garlands from window to window; golden chains from star to star – and I dance.

IIIB. ANTIQUE

Gracieux fils de Pan! Autour de ton front
 couronné de fleurettes et de baies, tes yeux,
 des boules précieuses, remuent. Tachées
 de lies brunes, tes joues se creusent. Tes
 crocs luisent. Ta poitrine ressemble à une
 cithare, des tintements circulent dans tes
 bras blonds. Ton coeur bat dans ce ventre
 où dort le double sexe. Promène-toi, la nuit
 en mouvant doucement cette cuisse, cette
 seconde cuisse et cette jambe de gauche.

IV. ROYAUTÉ

Un beau matin, chez un peuple fort doux, un
 homme et une femme superbes criaient sur
 la place publique: "Mes amis, je veux qu'elle
 soit reine!" "Je veux être reine!" Elle riait et
 tremblait. Il parlait aux amis de révélation,
 d'épreuve terminée. Ils se pâmaient l'un
 contre l'autre.

En effet ils furent rois toute une matinée
 où les tentures carminées se relevèrent
 sur les maisons, et tout l'après-midi, où ils
 s'avancèrent du côté des jardins de palmes.

V. MARINE

Les chars d'argent et de cuivre
 Les proues d'acier et d'argent
 Battent l'écume,
 Soulèvent les souches des ronces.
 Les courants de la lande,
 Et les ornières immenses du reflux,
 Filent circulairement vers l'est,
 Vers les piliers de la forêt,
 Vers les fûts de la jetée,
 Dont l'angle est heurté par des tourbillons
 de lumière.

IIIB. ANTIQUE

Oh, gracious son of Pan! Thine eyes – those
 precious globes – glance slowly; thy brow
 is crowned with little flowers and berries.
 Thy hollow cheeks are spotted with brown
 lees; thy tusks shine. Thy breast resembles
 a cithara; tinkling sounds run through thy
 blond arms. Thy heart beats in that womb
 where sleeps Hermaphrodite. Walk at night,
 softly moving this thigh, this other thigh, this
 left leg.

IV. ROYALTY

On a beautiful morning, in a country
 inhabited by a mild and gentle people, a
 man and a woman of proud presence stood
 in the public square and cried aloud: "My
 friends, it is my wish that she should be
 queen." She launched and trembled. To his
 friends he spoke of a revelation, of a test
 concluded. Swooning they leaned one
 against the other.

And during one whole morning, whilst the
 crimson hangings were displayed on the
 houses, and during the whole afternoon,
 while they advanced towards the palm
 gardens, they were indeed kings.

V. MARINE

Chariots of silver and of copper
 Prows of steel and of silver
 Beat the foam,
 Lift the stems of the brambles.
 The streams of the barren parts
 And the immense tracks of the ebb
 Flow circularly towards the east,
 Towards the pillars of the forest,
 Towards the piles of the jetty,
 Against whose angles are hurled whirlpools
 of light.

VI. INTERLUDE

J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage.

VII. BEING BEAUTEOUS

Devant une neige un Être de Beauté de haute taille. Des sifflements de mort et des cercles de musique sourde font monter, s'élargir et trembler comme un spectre ce corps adoré: des blessures écarlates et noires éclatent dans les chaires superbes. Les couleurs propres de la vie se foncent, dansent, et se dégagent autour de la Vision, sur le chantier. Et les frissons s'élèvent et grondent, et la saveur forcenée de ces effets se chargeant avec les sifflements mortels et les rauques musiques que le monde, loin derrière nous, lance sur notre mère de beauté,—elle recule, elle se dresse. O! nos os sont revêtus d'un nouveau corps amoureux.

Ô la face cendrée, l'écusson de crin, les bras de cristal! le canon sur lequel je dois m'abattre à travers la mêlée des arbres et de l'air léger!

VI. INTERLUDE

I alone hold the key to this savage parade.

VII. BEING BEAUTEOUS

Against a background of snow is a beautiful Being of majestic stature. Death is all round her, and whistling, dying breather, and circles of hollow music, cause this adored body to rise, to swell, and to tremble like a spectre. Scarlet and black wounds break out on the superb flesh. Colours which belong to life deepen, dance, and separate themselves around the vision, upon the path. Shudders rise and mutter; and the mad savour of all these things, heavy with dying groans and raucous music, is hurled at our Mother of Beauty by the world far behind us. She recoils, she stands erect Oh rapture! Our bones are covered anew with a body of love.

Ah! The pale ashen face, the mane-like hair, the arms of crystal. And there is the cannon upon which I must cast myself through the noise of trees and light winds.

VIII. PARADE

Des drôles très solides. Plusieurs ont exploité vos mondes. Sans besoins, et peu pressés de mettre en oeuvre leurs brillantes facultés et leur expérience de vos consciences. Quels hommes mûrs! Des yeux hébétés à la façon de la nuit d'été, rouges et noirs, tricolores, d'acier piqué d'étoiles d'or; des faciès déformés, plombés, blémis, incendiés; des enrouements folâtres! La démarche cruelle des oripeaux!—Il y a quelques jeunes -

Ô le plus violent Paradis de la grimace enrage!... Chinois, Hottentots, bohémiens, niais, hyènes, Molochs, vieilles démentes, démons sinistres, ils mêlent les tours populaires, maternels, avec les poses et les tendresses bestiales. Ils interpréteraient des pièces nouvelles et des chansons "bonnes filles". Maîtres jongleurs, ils transforment le lieu et les personnes, et usent de la comédie magnétique.

J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage.

IX. DÉPART

Assez vu. La vision s'est rencontrée à tous les airs.

Assez eu. Rumeurs des Villes, le soir, et au soleil, et toujours.

Assez connu. Les arrêts de la vie.— O Rumeurs et Visions!

Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs!

VIII. PARADE

These are very sturdy rogues. Many of them have made use of you and your like. Without wants, they are in no hurry to put into action their brilliant faculties and their experience of your consciences. What mature men! Here are sottish eyes out of a midsummer night's dream – red, black, tricolours; eyes of steel spotted with golden stars; deformed faces, leaden-hued, livid, enflamed, wanton hoarseness. They have the ungainly bearing of rag dolls. There are youths among them.

It is a violent Paradise of mad grimaces... Chinese, Hottentots, gypsies, simpletons, hyaenas, Molochs, old insanities, sinister demons, they alternate popular or maternal tricks with bestial poses and caresses. They can interpret modern plays of songs of simple naivety at will. Master jugglers, they transform places and people, and make use of magnetic comedy.

I alone hold the key to this savage parade.

IX. DEPARTURE

Sufficiently seen. – The vision has been met in all guises.

Sufficiently heard. – Rumours of the town at night, in the sunlight, at all times.

Sufficiently known. – Life's decrees. Oh Rumours! Oh Vision!

Departure in the midst of love and new rumours.

GERGELY MADARAS



© BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

Gergely Madaras is Music Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège. Together, they have performed across Belgium and toured to Europe and South America. Gergely was previously Music Director of the Orchestre Dijon Bourgogne and Chief Conductor of the Savaria Symphony Orchestra. As a guest conductor, Gergely's recent highlights include engagements with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Philharmonia, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, and many others. The 2023-24 season sees Gergely return to the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Musikkollegium Winterthur, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Hungarian State Opera and Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra. He makes debuts with the WDR Sinfonieorchester, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Turku Philharmonic and Sao Paulo State Symphony. Born in Budapest in 1984, Gergely first began studying folk music with the last generation of authentic Hungarian gipsy and peasant musicians at the age of five. He went on to study classical flute, violin and composition, graduating from the flute faculty of the Liszt Academy in Budapest, as well as the conducting faculty of the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, where he studied with Mark Stringer.

IAN BOSTRIDGE

Ian Bostridge's extraordinary international career has taken him to the foremost concert halls, orchestras and opera houses in the world. Synonymous with the works of Schubert and Britten, his recital career has taken him to the Salzburg, Edinburgh, Munich, Vienna, Aldeburgh and Schwarzenberg Schubertiade Festivals and to the main stages of Carnegie Hall, the Bayerische Staatsoper, La Monnaie and Teatro alla Scala. Highlights of the 23/24 season include artistic residencies for the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and as Duo Artist in Residence at LIED Basel with Julius Drake. His plans include Les Nuits d'Été with Orchestre de Chambre du Luxembourg cond. Corinna Niemeyer, St Matthew Passion with Musikkollegium Winterthur cond. Roberto González-Monjas and Mendelssohn's Lobgesang with Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León cond. Koncz, alongside concert tours in Japan and Korea. His many recordings have won all the major international record prizes and been nominated for 15 Grammys. The 22/23 season saw the release of Ian's latest two albums through Pentatone: The Folly of Desire with Brad Mehldau and Schwanengesang with Lars Vogt.



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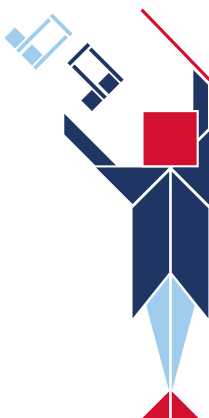
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