

21.10. AT 19:00
HELSINKI MUSIC CENTRE

RSO FESTIVAL THOMAS ADÈS
INFERNO

THOMAS ADÈS
CONDUCTOR

Igor Stravinsky: 30 min

Orpheus

I Tableau

Orpheus

Air de danse

Dance of the Angel of Death

Interlude

II Tableau

Dance of the Furies

Air de danse – Interlude – Air de danse

Pas d'action

Pas de deux

Interlude

Pas d'action

III Tableau

Orpheus's Apotheosis

INTERVAL 20 MIN

Thomas Adès:
Inferno from the ballet Dante

40 min

- I Abandon Hope*
- II The Selfish*
- III The Ferryman*
- IV Pavan of the Souls in Limbo*
- V Paolo and Francesca*
- VI The Gluttons*
- VII The Suicides*
- VIII The Deviants*
- IX The Fortune-tellers*
- X The Popes*
- XI The Hypocrites*
- XII The Thieves*
- XIII Satan*

THOMAS ADÈS

English composer Thomas Adès (b. 1971) began making a name for himself in musical circles in the first half of the 1990s, when he was still only in his early twenties. They reckoned he would go far, and have not been disappointed – but probably not quite as anticipated. His first great work was the chamber opera *Powder Her Face* (1995), a fanciful tale about the notorious, decadent Duchess of Argyll. Its success lent his breakthrough a suitably scandalous edge, but his art soon became more profound, as demonstrated by his orchestral *Asyla* (1997).

Success has not resulted in a loss of integrity for Adès. Drawing on fine-tuned harmonies, rhythmic details and masterly orchestration, he has succeeded in endowing even traditional gestures with idiosyncratic ambiguity. Light and darkness, barbarity and tenderness, irony and gravity live side by side.

Conscious and subconscious stand in a balanced relationship in Adès's composition: "The music in my mind is a sort of underground river that flows on all the time, and it's looking for a channel," he once said. "So in a piece, for example, with an idea, text and character, they are just the channel and I have to let them dig out, if you like, the piece from the rock." (*BBC Music Magazine* July 2013)

His many great works for orchestra have stood out like fixed points in Thomas Adès's career: *America: A Prophecy* for mezzo-soprano and orchestra (1999), the violin concerto *Concentric Paths* (2005), *Tevot* (2007), *In Seven Days* for piano and orchestra (2008), *Polaris* (2010), *Totentanz* for mezzo-soprano, baritone and orchestra (2013) and the piano concerto of 2018. He has, however, also written works for smaller ensemble that are equally important in his portfolio.

Since *Powder Her Face*, Thomas Adès has composed two operas: *The Tempest* (2004) inspired by Shakespeare's play, and *The Exterminating Angel* (2016) based on the film written and directed by Luis Buñuel. His three-parts ballet *Dante*, after the classic *Divine Comedy*, was to have been premiered at Covent Garden in May 2020 but the pandemic intervened.

Another vital aspect of Adès the composer is his all-round musicianship: he is also a fine pianist and conductor. He has been Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival and Britten Professor of Composition at London's Royal Academy of Music.

IGOR STRAVINSKY: ORPHEUS

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1970) wrote the music for the ballet *Orpheus* (1947) as a co-project with choreographer George Balanchine and it was the last work of his ‘Neoclassical’ period. Its orchestra is smaller than usual. There are no percussions apart from timpani, and Orpheus’s lyre has a special role of its own. The structures and mode of expression are both restrained, and the music is mostly unhurried and quiet.

The ancient Orpheus myth is about a journey to the kingdom of the dead from which there is no return. At the end, the music takes leave of earth but lingers on in the other world. The ballet seems to criticise human hubris and ambition.

4

In the melancholy opening tableau, Orpheus mourns his dead wife Eurydice. A dance then follows with a solo violin. The Angel of Death appears to lead Orpheus to Hades (the underworld), closely accompanied by strings and winds. In the Interlude, Orpheus and the Angel arrive at the lowest level of the kingdom of the

dead – the one to which the gods consign their enemies.

At the start of the second Tableau, the Furies surround Orpheus but he enchants them with his lyre, making the lost souls long for more music to console them. Peace now prevails in Hades, and the Furies blindfold Orpheus so that he may encounter Eurydice. In a long *pas de deux*, he dances with her; she is hidden behind a veil. The music slides from idyllic to ominous, until Orpheus rips the bandage from his eyes and Eurydice sinks, dead, to the ground.

A brassy Interlude briefly summarises the course of events. The drama builds up when Orpheus is seized by Bacchantes and torn to pieces. The orchestra shows how strong it is in violent rhythms and the ballet’s only *fortissimo*. The third and last Tableau is Orpheus’s apotheosis, a fugue on four French horns in which Apollo, who had given Orpheus his lyre, appears to reclaim it and raises Orpheus’s song to heaven.

THOMAS ADÈS: INFERNO

Thomas Adès handles different techniques with ease and is not afraid to grasp at challenging topics. One recent example is the piano concerto *In Seven Days* (2008) performed by the FRSO in 2016, in which he combines the story of Creation with the theory of evolution. He is just as fearless in tackling Dante’s *Inferno*, commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. “The music of this ballet is,” he says, “a grateful tribute to Franz Liszt, the composer of Hell and demonic music [the

Dante Symphony, 1857 and the quasi sonata *Après une lecture du Dante*, 1849]. The score plays continuously.”

Adès looks upon Liszt as a travelling companion familiar with the abyss of Hell. And both composers are blessed with a gift for spectacle and fantasy. Adès supplied his *Inferno* with a list of the stops along that journey.

Death is democratic. Above the gateway to Hell are Dante’s most famous words: “Abandon hope all ye who enter here.”

Section II, The Selfish, tells of those “who run with banners, stung by wasps”, and Section III the Ferryman who rows dead souls across the river Styx, the boundary between Earth and the Underworld. Section IV bewails the fate of the souls in limbo, i.e. born before the birth of Christ; their only crime is original sin and their punishment is never being able to be in the presence of God.

Francesca da Rimini appears in Section V with her lover Paolo (also the characters in the *Symphonic Fantasy after Dante* by Tchaikovsky). Their punishment for adultery is an endless whirlwind.

The Gluttons (VI) are souls who over-indulged in food, drink, or something else and their fate is to wallow in slime created by eternal rain, hail, sleet and snow. Suicides (VII) are transformed into gnarled, bleeding trees mauled by harpies. The Deviants (VIII) represent those guilty

of violence against God, Nature or order, and they are destined to crawl across burning sands.

The Fortune-tellers (IX) are soothsayers who claim to predict the future. Adès also includes flatterers and critics. Their fate is to walk in two directions, their heads bent back, tears running down between their buttocks.

The Popes (X) are the politically ambitious, stuffed head first down a hole, one on top of the other, the soles of their feet blazing on fire. The Hypocrites (XI) are weighed down by coats of lead and the Thieves (XII) transform endlessly into giant lizards and back again, all the while tormented by snakes.

The final section (XIII) features Satan, portrayed as a giant demon in a frozen lake, his bat-like wings flapping. Dante and Virgil climb out of Hell and see the stars.

THE FINNISH RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (FRSO) is the orchestra of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle), and its mission is to produce and promote Finnish musical culture.

The Radio Orchestra of ten players founded in 1927 grew to symphony orchestra proportions in the 1960s. Its Chief Conductors have been Toivo Haapanen, Nils-Eric Fougstedt, Paavo Berglund, Okko Kamu, Leif Segerstam, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Sakari Oramo, Hannu Lintu, and as of autumn 2021 Nicholas Collon.

In addition to the great Classical-Romantic masterpieces, the latest contemporary music is a major item in the repertoire of the FRSO, which each year premieres a number of Yle commissions. During the 2021/2022 season it will premiere six new works.

Another of the orchestra's tasks is to record all Finnish orchestral music for the Yle archive.

The FRSO has recorded works by Mahler, Bartók, Sibelius, Hakola, Lindberg, Saariaho, Sallinen, Kaipainen, Kokkonen and others. It has twice won a Gramophone Award: for its disc of Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto in 2006 and of Bartók Violin Concertos in 2018. Other distinctions have included BBC Music Magazine, Académie Charles Cros, MIDEM Classical awards and Grammy nominations in 2020 and 2021. Its disc of tone poems and songs by Sibelius won an International Classical Music Award (ICMA) in 2018, and it has been the recipient of a Finnish EMMA award in 2016 and 2019.

FRSO concerts are broadcast live on the Yle Areena and Radio 1 channels, and later on the same evening on the Yle Teema TV channel. Recordings of the concerts are also shown on Yle TV 1.