

Lunchtime Concert: Nina Robertson

30 October 2020



For today's lunchtime concert we welcome flautist Nina Robertson, accompanied by Daniel King Smith on piano.

Robertson is presenting a programme that includes music by Schubert and Françaix, as well as a newly written piece by LA-based film composer and orchestrator Jeff Atmajian.

Programme

Schubert	<i>Variations on Trockne Blumen</i> for flute and piano (1824)
Debussy	<i>Syrinx</i> for solo flute (1913)
Harty	<i>In Ireland, a fantasy</i> for flute and piano (1918)
Françaix	<i>The Conversation between Two Parakeets</i> for flute and alto flute (1989)
Atmajian	<i>The Awakening of Spring</i> for flute and piano (2020 - world premiere)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Schubert wrote over 600 songs during his short life. He completed *Die Schone Mullerin*, of which *Trockne Blumen* is the 18th song, in 1823. He had written previously of his desperation about his health and his lack of love and friendship. The text here mirrors that bleakness: devastated by his unrequited love, the narrator imagines taking the now withered flowers (given to him by the miller's daughter) to his grave, hoping they may then spring forth again and prove to her that his love was true.

The opening of the theme is a desolate winter landscape based on the trudging minor chords of the original song. After several increasingly demanding variations for both players, we escape into sunny E major for a final march.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

In 1889, at the Paris Exhibition, Debussy experienced Javanese gamelan music for the first time. Its use of pentatonic scales was to become a recurring feature of his sound palette, often evoking the other-worldly.

Syrinx was written as incidental music for the play *Psyche*, by Mourey and was first performed in the theatre by Louis Fleury, the celebrity flautist of the day, in dramatic darkness.

In Greek mythology, the god Pan pursues the beautiful nymph, Syrinx. She transforms herself into water reeds in order to hide by the riverbank, but Pan cuts the reeds trying to find her, killing her in the process. The panpipes he makes from those reeds then immortalise her.

Hamilton Harty (1879-1941)

Herbert Hamilton Harty was an Irish organist and pianist who moved to London at the turn of the last century in order to pursue his career as an accompanist. He then had several spells as a chief conductor – firstly with the Halle, then with the LSO.

The preface of this piece states: "In a Dublin street at dusk, two wandering street musicians are playing."

After an improvisatory beginning, he draws on Celtic inflections – reels and cuts – and the rhythms of a jig to conjure up the scene.

Jean Françaix (1912-1997)

Françaix was a neoclassical composer, pianist, and orchestrator. He was born into a family of musicians who introduced him to some of the finest teachers of the day. For example, he was taught by Nadia Boulanger and certainly impressed Ravel, who said of him “among the child’s gifts I observe above all the most fruitful an artist can possess, that of curiosity.”

His style is marked by a lightness and wit, often quoting other composers. Here the *Allegro* gives us a dialogue of constant chatter, whereas the *Presto* is furious, with offbeat accents and angular phrases. After a pavane-like, soulful *Larghetto*, we finish here with a buoyant and spikey *Scherzando*.

The alto flute is definitely the less nimble, heavier bird, having perhaps put on a few lockdown kilos.

Jeff Atmajian (born 1960)

Jeff Atmajian is a renowned orchestrator, arranger and composer based in Venice Beach, LA.

This piece was written for his friend Charlotte, to encourage her to practise during lockdown! The genesis of it was the piano figuration in the first bar, from which it grows in an extremely organic way. The cadenza in particular conjures up for me the hazy light and wonderful breadth of a pastoral landscape.

Jeff says, “Due to lockdown I felt the world was at peace, even amongst all its uncertainty. That quiet permeated my creative mind enough to make me feel that I could hear music again, whereas most of the time the noise of the world drowns out my voice. Although we were trapped inside, this piece was finished in April and it felt that Spring might just be blossoming outdoors.”



Meet our performers

Nina Roberston studied at the RCM with Susan Milan, winning numerous prizes. Since then she has had a successful and widely varied freelance career, playing with symphony, ballet and opera orchestras, in West End shows, and recording many TV and film scores.

Recent projects include solo alto flute for the film *Aladdin*, piccolo in *Madame Butterfly* for ENO and Robbie Williams' Christmas album.

Nina coaches on the British Isles Music Festival chamber music course every summer and is committed to working with the RPO Resound team, taking music into schools.

Daniel King Smith has given concerts all over the world as both soloist and accompanist. He has been broadcast on both BBC TV/Radio in the UK (In Tune, Proms, Young Musician of the Year) and NHK TV/Radio in Japan, most recently in recital with Yuki Ito as part of NHK's Best of Classic and Classic Club series. Daniel has recorded a number of CDs, including releases with Yuki Ito for Sony and with Anna Hashimoto on the Meridian label.

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