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## In Quest of Beauty

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weekend, or avoid meeting them both somewhere along the route of this particular journey. There are many times when I and my colleagues working in the arts feel that we are entrenched on a battlefield or picking our way through a minefield, but overall I prefer to view my landscape as arcadian – verdant, flourishing, vibrant, nourishing – and surely that is the most important reason to work in this field: to travel its never-ending paths in quest of beauty.

I shall cheat a little and not attempt to give a clear definition of beauty, because others' efforts to do so have already filled libraries, but I will make the sweeping assertion that beauty is inseparable from art. For proof, you need to look no further than to your central characters of Berlioz and Shakespeare: when Berlioz encountered the actress Harriet Smithson for the first time, playing Shakespeare, he saw the playwright's genius absolutely personified in this woman – art and beauty merged into one.

Looking back over my own journey, I recall that my earliest pleasures and abilities were to be found in cooking and singing: I was probably about 12 years old when I first produced a dinner for some tolerant guests of my parents; and I regularly devised musical entertainments, initially for home consumption and then more publicly during my years at school and university. These two things have remained congruent and intertwined all my life, cooking as a hobby and music as my profession. I have always

regarded my commissioning of new work and choosing repertoire for orchestral seasons and festival programmes as comparable to preparing and serving food and wine – essential ingredients and essential nourishment, in both cases. And I wholeheartedly agree with the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who once said: “dining is and always was a great artistic opportunity”. Having a lovely meal at the heart of studying great music and literature is indeed fitting and an artistic opportunity too good to miss.

35 years ago, in my final year at Cambridge, I began to get to know Berlioz better, as one of my set texts were the *Memoirs*, brilliantly translated by David Cairns; and David himself came to give a superb lecture which I have always remembered. In those days I was still harbouring ambitions to sing professionally, but the realisation gradually but painfully dawned on me that I was not destined to be the next Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau or even to scale the foothills of his Mount Olympus. So I went to work for Universal Edition as Promotion Manager and I found myself steeped in some of the most difficult and incomprehensible music ever written. I grew to know it, to like much of it and even to love some of it. This was the late 1970s, a time when the three points of what Benjamin Britten described as music's sacred triangle – the composer, the performer and the audience – had never been more alienated each from the other. For all their tearing up of historic conventions, using new vocabulary and redefining aesthetics, I still believe that those composers, the very antithesis of Britten, were nevertheless in pursuit of beauty of one kind or another – because they are artists.

Before heading north to run the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in 1984, I spent a year as Artistic Director of the City of London Festival, to which I would return more than 20 years later. It was then that I first came under the spell of Byron and came close to pulling off a production of *Manfred*, but was defeated in the struggle to find the last bits of sponsorship on which the Festival depended – and nothing has changed in that respect, I must say. But two summers later I travelled to Switzerland, for the first time finding myself in the shadow of the Jungfrau, where *Manfred* was set and, indeed, written. This place, I discovered, was one of the cradles of Romanticism and epitomised the quest for beauty: it was not only Byron who stopped here and then passed through this beautiful landscape, but also Goethe, Wordsworth and Turner who came before him and the likes of Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Nietzsche – the list goes on – who followed in their footsteps.

Byron had just spent weeks with the Shelleys on Lake Geneva in creative ferment, wrestling with Prometheus, half man and half god:

over-balancing, and his should be the mission statement for all of us who work in the arts.

I go back to the Jungfrau region every summer and the ghosts of great artists who travelled there before have certainly fed into some of my programmes for the City of London Festival. I took a poet, a composer and a photographer with me in 2007 and gave them each a copy of *Manfred* as their only preparatory homework: in the 2008 Festival we premiered the resulting new work, a melodrama depicting Byron's early 19th century journey from London, in disgrace, to Switzerland and the Jungfrau, then on to Italy.

Many years later, when Nietzsche followed exactly these same paths through the Swiss Alps and stopped to gaze at the Jungfrau mountain, he even tried his hand at composing some piano music – entitled *Manfred Meditation*, appropriately enough – and he sent the result to Wagner who apparently rolled around on the floor in helpless laughter, which I find hard to picture. In his *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, Nietzsche argues that the tragedy of Ancient Greece was the highest form of art, due to its mixture of both Apollonian and Dionysian elements into one seamless whole, allowing the spectator to experience the full spectrum of the human condition. Apollo and Dionysus, not Prometheus, are the Olympian gods which bring us to the heart of the matter, I feel. Great art has surely always required emotion, expression and extroversion – the Dionysian – to coexist with form, structure and containment – the Apollonian: true beauty springs from both of them.

In my recent City of London Festivals I have to some extent turned or returned to nature for inspiration. Last year it was bees: dance is their artform of choice – when they find a new source of nectar, they do the waggle dance to guide their colleagues to the flowers in question – but we commissioned an art installation, poetry and music, placed working beehives on the roofs of many important City buildings, and discovered that it was none other than Christopher Wren himself who invented a transparent hive for the observation of bees. This year we celebrated birds, which are nature's musicians and the source of inspiration for many composers and other artists, classical and indigenous, whose work we brought from Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. Bees and birds can certainly lead us in quest of beauty.

2012 will be the Festival's 50th anniversary and you will probably be interested to hear that we shall be presenting Berlioz' *Requiem* twice in St Paul's Cathedral, with the LSO and Colin Davis, on the opening nights, 25th and 26th June. Wags among you, who know the echoing acoustics of the Cathedral, might say that you can hear the music more than once



Lord Byron, FRS (1788 – 1824)

Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* found its time again, as the Greek gods came to symbolise the heroic human potential of late 18th and early 19th century Europe; Goethe, Beethoven and others had already picked up the theme and, in those intense weeks on Lake Geneva, Mary Shelley created her *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, Percy embarked on *Prometheus Unbound* and Byron wrote his own *Prometheus*. His poem was relatively restrained by comparison with the unfettered personal outpouring which immediately followed, his *Manfred* (or *Man Freed*, as he surely meant it). This great but rambling self-reflection, set on the slopes of the Jungfrau from which the poet in his remorse threatens to throw himself into the valley below, shows Byron's brand of romanticism at its most over-reaching.

Some years later Robert Browning wrote these lines in one of his poems: "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,/Or what's a heaven for?" Whilst Byron tended to go too far, Browning offers a manageable Romanticism which reaches into the beyond but without

without having to come back the next evening. But the performances will, hopefully, be recorded for posterity and the occasions themselves will be spectacular. There are other important plans, among which we hope will be the London premiere of a recent work which I saw in Sweden – in Stockholm’s Central Station – called *Dawn of Galamanta*. This was a collaboration between physically disabled artists of all disciplines working with able-bodied musicians to produce a wonderful new work under the guidance of Christian Lindberg, who conducted it. One actress came to the front of the stage, rose out of her wheelchair, struck an extraordinary pose and captivated the audience with a gesture which said “I am beautiful” – so she was, for all of us in the audience, and so was the piece.

Over the past 15 years I have been involved with a couple of projects in which new musical instruments have been developed using the latest technologies to allow people with very limited movement to make music, not only in schools or in special centres for young people but also potentially at the highest adult professional level. The most important of these has involved the former trumpeter, Clarence Adoo, who was driving back from a concert with the Northern Symphonia when his car overturned on black ice; he has remained paralysed from the neck down ever since. Not to be defeated, this remarkable man has been determined to continue to make music and we have helped in the development of an instrument for him to play which draws upon advanced technology: this is called *HeadSpace* and has also given its name to his ensemble of professional brass playing colleagues for which new music has been specially written. Ten years on, Clarence returned to the professional platform and played his new instrument in the closing concert of the 2005 St Magnus Festival in Orkney, which I was directing. For 2012, the Golden Jubilee of the City of London Festival, we hope to commission a new work for the Headspace Ensemble and present it as part of a wider exploration of the aesthetic and creative opportunities to be found at this new musical frontier.

The development of this and other instruments not only involves more people in music making but also offers an extended palate for composers: it follows, therefore, that it should make demands too on the conservatoires to extend their teaching and on orchestras to extend their instrumental range. If Berlioz was with us now, he would surely have been as interested today in extending the possibilities of the orchestra, taking advantage of the latest technologies, as he was 150 years ago. Why has the symphony orchestra, which was developed over time by composers from

the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, especially by Berlioz of course, been frozen in the shape and form that was demanded by composers a century ago?

We associate Berlioz with growing the orchestra, always looking to add new instruments and promoting their development, in his quest for beauty. But we should not forget that big orchestras were already very much in evidence in France. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Haydn wrote his Paris symphonies for the Concerts de la Loge Olympique, directed by the larger-than-life Chevalier de St Georges, records show that these works were first performed by an orchestra which included no fewer than 40 violins and 10 double basses – greater than the forces normally deployed by any of today’s major ensembles, and no fewer than those found in the New Philharmonic Society’s orchestra which Berlioz conducted in London in the 1850s.

My career has taken me into the management of smaller-scale orchestras, but size is not everything. About 10 years ago I spent a year and a half advising a chamber orchestra that had taken up residence in Imperial College and set up a joint physics and music professorship for Jonathan Harvey in partnership with the RCM, a musical cuckoo in the scientific nest of Imperial. Jonathan introduces new technologies and new instruments into the orchestra to extend the range of musical colours and sounds available to him. This orchestra fell victim to an earlier Arts Council purge, but I am certain that Berlioz would have wanted to work in this way and perhaps we owe it to him to find a way back into the orchestral family for Clarence Adoo and his Headspace. These are messages which we shall be giving out at the heart of our 2012 Festival alongside those epic performances of the Berlioz *Requiem*.

Now I am in danger of displaying a Dionysian disregard for your Apollonian and, I must say very sensible, instruction to speak for 15 minutes. Apollo therefore demands that I wrap up my words and return you to the feast. I said that I would not attempt to give a clear definition of beauty, but perhaps Apollo and Dionysus together can do that for us: the synthesis of perfect form and flowing energy. Our quest is perhaps to reach beyond our grasp, comprehend Nietzsche’s theatre and strive for Browning’s heaven. And on that note, I propose a Dionysian toast to Berlioz, Shakespeare, art and beauty.