

Sat 18 Jun 2016

Hall One, 7.30pm

Byron in Switzerland

1816 – The Year Without a Summer

Louis Schwizgebel piano
Di Sherlock narrator
Ian Ritchie narrator
Alberto Venzago photography

Programme

Canto I – Farewell to London

Liszt / Schubert *Erlikönig*

Byron On his separation from
Lady Byron (February 1816)

Beethoven Sonata No. 14 *Moonlight*
Adagio sostenuto

Byron Letter to Lady Byron
(February 1816)

Hensel 'March' from *Das Jahr*

Byron *Fare Thee Well!*

Canto II – Lake Geneva

Mary Shelley Preface to *Frankenstein*

Liszt *Cloches de Genève* from
Années de pèlerinage
(Year 1: Switzerland)

Byron 'I had a dream' from *Darkness*

Hensel 'September' from *Das Jahr*

Byron 'To Augusta', from *Alpine Journal*
(Lake Geneva, September 1816)

'We are the fools of time and
terror' from *Manfred*

Liszt 'Vallée d'Obermann' from
Années de pèlerinage
(Year 1: Switzerland)

INTERVAL 20 minutes

Canto III – The Jungfrau

Judith Bingham *Byron, Violent Progress*
(Melodrama)

Canto IV – Onward Journey

Schubert *Abschied von der Erde* (piano)

Byron 'Once more upon the waters!'
from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Mendelssohn Rondo capriccioso, Op. 14

Programme Notes

Lord Byron, maverick aristocrat, dedicated revolutionary, military adventurer and serial lover, was the ultimate brooding Romantic poet. Self-exiled from London in 1816, in the wake of accusations of incest with his half-sister, Augusta, and bitter separation from his wife, he travelled through Belgium and Germany, reaching Switzerland in the non-existent 'summer'. This melodramatic soirée recalls Byron's journey and the creation in 1816 of his quasi autobiographical verse epic *Manfred* at the foot of the snow-clad Jungfrau mountain, following the weeks he had spent indoors beside Lake Geneva in the company of Percy Shelley, Mary Godwin (soon to be Mrs Shelley) and Dr Polidori.

Unknown to everyone at the time, the 'year without a summer' in 1816 was caused by the previous year's catastrophic explosion of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, whose volcanic dust blotted out the sun, led to climate change and crop failure across the world, and created an atmosphere as dark as the poet's imagination. It was an extraordinary time in which Mary Godwin / Shelley wrote *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*, Percy Shelley embarked on *Prometheus Unbound*, Dr Polidori worked on *The Vampire* (later to inspire Stoker's *Dracula*) and Byron himself wrote a major poem, *Prometheus*, which set the scene for his *Manfred* ('man freed' or unbound).

This creative escape from the stormy cold and darkness of the 'volcanic winter' had a far-reaching impact on Romanticism in the 19th century, a period in which the ideas of the superhuman and reaching beyond one's grasp were reflected in the figure of Prometheus – half god and half man – who stole the fire from the gods and gave it to mankind. If Napoleon had been the real-life hero of the early 19th century, before power corrupted him, then Prometheus was the popular fictional one.

Shortly after Byron's time, Felix Mendelssohn regularly visited the Jungfrau region to draw and paint the landscape and, latterly, to mourn the untimely death of his sister, Fanny Hensel. This concert also represents a modern journey to the Jungfrau, made in 2007 by the curator Ian Ritchie, with composer Judith Bingham, poet Aidan Andrew Dun and photographer Alberto Venzago, retracing the steps of Byron and inspiring much creativity, including the new melodrama *Byron, Violent Progress* which was premiered in 2008. About this work, Bingham writes: 'After visiting the Jungfrau I came back with my head full of Byron, his life and work. I quickly wrote a setting of his poem *She Walks in Beauty* and, when I started to think about writing a melodrama, the song kept coming back into my head. So the music is a set of 13 variations on the song, which is quoted at the beginning. The Alpine landscape only seemed to exacerbate Byron's feelings of failure and guilt after his scandalous departure from London in 1816. This melodrama charts a night of bad dreams and painful recollections, using Byron's own words and two new sonnets by Aidan Andrew Dun.'

Programme notes © Ian Ritchie

Biographies

Swiss-Chinese pianist **Louis Schwizgebel** has been described as an 'insightful musician' by the *New York Times* and 'already one of the great masters of the piano' by *Res Musica*. He has performed with a number of great orchestras in the UK, including the London Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Scottish Orchestra and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and abroad, including Lyon, Nagoya, Macao, New York, Shanghai and Vienna. Recent recital highlights include performances at London's Wigmore Hall, the Fribourg International Piano Series, Munich's Herkulesaal and, with violinist Benjamin Beilman, the Berlin Philharmonie. In 2013 he became a BBC New Generation Artist.

Di Sherlock has worked in physical theatre, the West End, multi-media and television. Her writer-director work includes *Miss Havisham's Expectations*, *The World's Wife* (Edinburgh Festival, Trafalgar Studios); *Services No Longer Required*, *Salford Tales* for BBC Philharmonic; and *Who Killed Ramona Rhapsody*, broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and subsequently produced in Holland and Germany. As a reciter, she has performed a number of times with Ian Ritchie. Her book *Come Into The Garden* features poems chronicling her parents' journey through cancer and dementia, and was published in 2015.

Ian Ritchie studied singing at the Royal College of Music (winning the Mario Grisi Prize), Trinity College, Cambridge, and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. He has directed several prominent arts organisations, including City of London Sinfonia, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Opera North, St Magnus Festival and City of London Festival. He is currently Artistic Director of the Setúbal Music Festival, the Setúbal Youth Ensemble (Portugal) and The Musical Brain. In addition to interdisciplinary curating, he is in demand as a speaker, performs as a narrator and is occasionally heard as a singer.

Judith Bingham was born in Nottingham, began composing as a small child and then studied composition and singing at the Royal Academy of Music in London. She was a member of the BBC Singers for many years and, between 2004 and 2009, she was their Composer in Association. A recording of Bingham's choral works by Wells Cathedral Choir and Matthew Owens was a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice in the 2013 *Gramophone* Awards issue. She recently wrote an anthem for the re-interment of Richard III.

Zurich-based photographer and filmmaker **Alberto Venzago** initially made his name as a photojournalist. He is the official photographer of the London Symphony Orchestra and has worked for the Boston Symphony Orchestra: music is a recurring theme in his work on films. His international awards include gold at the New York Film Festival. 'An authentic image is more important than a beautiful image' is how he sums up his philosophy.

1816 – The Year Without a Summer
Conceived and curated by Ian Ritchie (ianritchie.org)
17 & 18 June 2016

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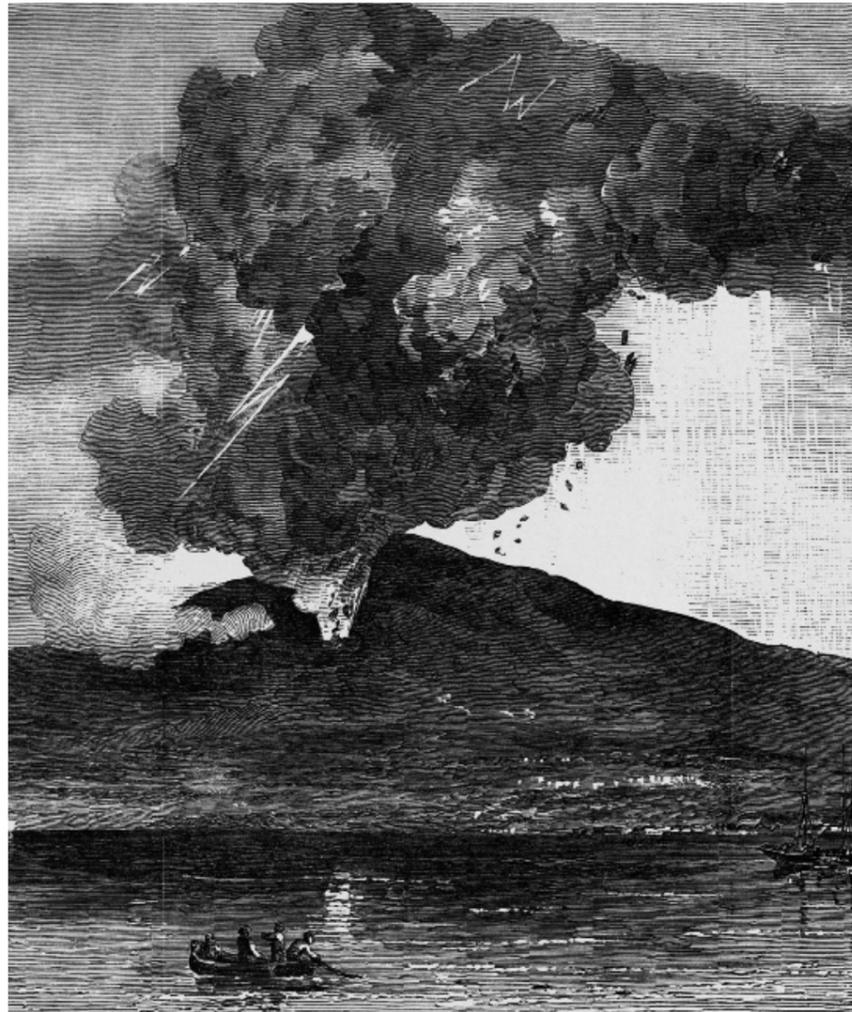
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Foyer Exhibition

Fri 17 Jun, 6–10pm & Sat 18 Jun, 10am–10pm

Die Jungfrau: She Walks in Beauty – An exhibition of projected photography by Alberto Venzago, capturing the awesome beauty of one of Switzerland's most iconic mountains.



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