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Harrison Birtwistle: 85th birthday performances

(July 2019)



Harrison Birtwistle celebrated his 85th on 15 July and the birthday year brings a series of performances ranging from epic opera to intimate chamber works.

The months following Harrison Birtwistle's 85th birthday on 15 July bring a series of major performances across Europe. Celebrations embrace the Dartington Festival and the BBC Proms, his magnum opus *The Mask of Orpheus* at English National Opera, a new set of songs *...when falling asleep* unveiled in Birmingham and Hamburg, and a feature in Porto culminating with his latest orchestral work *Deep Time*.

Birtwistle is featured composer at the Dartington Festival on 19 and 20 August, launched with the Gildas Quartet playing his *String Quartet: The Tree of Strings*. An all-Birtwistle programme of chamber, brass and vocal works includes Tom Randle singing *The Sadness of Komachi* and a performance of *3 Settings of Lorine Niedecker*. The BBC Proms features his *Fantasia upon all the notes* at Cadogan Hall in London (9 September) and Birtwistle has contributed one of the orchestral variations celebrating Martyn Brabbins's 60th birthday, *Pictured Within*, at the Royal Albert Hall (13 August).

Martyn Brabbins is on the rostrum for five performances of a new staging of Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus* (published by Universal Edition) at English National Opera opening on 18 October. The stagework, with an intricate multi-layered libretto by Peter Zinovieff, is scored for epic vocal, orchestral and electronic forces, building into a three dimensional picture dissecting the inner meaning of Orpheus as man, myth and music. Daniel Kramer's staging will be the first in London since the opera's premiere at the London Coliseum over 30 years ago.

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group presents the world premiere of Birtwistle's new work for soprano, reciter and ensemble on 22 September at the CBSO Centre. ...*when falling asleep* includes texts by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), a poet the composer has already set in his *26 Orpheus Elegies* and *Bogenstrich*. The new work is intended as a companion piece for *The Woman and the Hare* – both pitch a soprano singer and a speaker against a small ensemble – which is also heard in the Birmingham concert conducted by Geoffrey Paterson together with *Three Songs from the Holy Forest*. The programme travels to the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg on 6 October within its *Britain Calling* festival.

Autumn highlights include the London Sinfonietta in Birtwistle's *5 Lessons in a Frame* at the Southbank Centre (15 October) and notable performances of his piano works: Nicolas Hodges gives the Austrian premieres of *Variations from the Golden Mountains* and *Intrada for piano and percussion* joining with Colin Currie at the Vienna Konzerthaus (26 September), while Tamara Stefanovich and Pierre-Laurent Aimard give the London premiere of *Keyboard Engine* for two pianos at the Southbank Centre (6 October).

Next season sees Portuguese and Swiss premieres of Birtwistle's newest orchestral work *Deep Time* conducted by Baldur Brönniman, with the Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto completing a feature on the composer at the Casa da Música (7 December) and with the Basel Sinfonietta (10 May). Paris plays host to the French premiere of *The Moth Requiem* with the Choeur de Radio France (8 February).

Photo: Philip Gatward

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