

# The Proms Listening Service

Radio 3's Tom Service proposes onward sonic explorations inspired by the music of tonight's Prom



ĒRIKS EŠENVALDS

## A Shadow

Dialogues of shadows: music often makes itself from the images of afterlives, its presence in the air as mysterious as the dance of shadows at twilight. **Pierre Boulez** made a whole piece from the idea of an acoustic clarinet and its electronic double in his *Dialogue de l'ombre double*. **Gustav Mahler** turned the centre of his Seventh Symphony into a game of shadows in the eerily elusive 'Schattenhaft' scherzo. **Eugène Ysaÿe** made a more playful 'Danse des ombres' from the sarabande of his Second Sonata for solo violin. Ēriks Ešenvalds is in good company.

BRITTEN

## Sinfonia da Requiem

A piece that was commissioned by Japan to celebrate 2,600 years of the Empire but rejected: the music was too dark, too depressing, too dangerous. So what happened to the other pieces that were accepted? They were composed by a huge range of composers, among them **Richard Strauss**, who was chosen by Joseph Goebbels as the German delegate to write his *Japanische Festmusik*, a piece of tub-thumping cynicism that's not quite as bad as **Wagner's American Centennial March** for the 100th anniversary of the USA but getting on for it. Hungarian composer **Sándor Veress** (who taught György Ligeti and Kurtág) composed his First Symphony for Japan, music of more than celebratory significance. Japan's own contingent included **Hisato Ohzawa**, who wrote his impressively monumental and programmatically descriptive Third Symphony, 'Symphony of the Founding of Japan'.

BEETHOVEN

## Symphony No. 9, 'Choral'

A song of the whole world that has been misused in the service of ever smaller worlds; employed as a song to bind my people together rather than yours; a national symbol as long it's my country we're talking about and not yours. Well, that's a potted history of the dark side of what's happened to the 'Ode to Joy' tune since Beethoven composed it as a piece for all of man- and woman-kind – apart, that is, from the friendless and spouseless, who are ordered out of utopia in Schiller's text and told to 'retreat, weeping, from our company'. Seriously, check out the text.

In the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, it's been a national anthem and nationalist symbol as well as a supra-nationalist calling card for the whole world to sing together. In that sense, every national anthem ever composed is a kind of cousin of the 'Ode to Joy' tune. Would anyone dare to try to write a melody for the whole of humanity today? Where could we realistically find a tune that circumscribes the globe? Probably not in a self-consciously utopian melody but rather in the mundanities of 'Happy Birthday' or the behemoths of pop music. Where the early 19th century had Beethoven, we have Ed Sheeran and Taylor Swift. Have nationalism and narcissism become today's utopias?