

The Proms Listening Service

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



HAYDN

The Creation – Chaos

It's not only Haydn: here are three other evocations of pre-creation chaos from different centuries. From 1737, the first, 'chaos' movement of **Jean-Féry Rebel**'s suite *Les Éléments* is one of the most strikingly 'modern' pieces of the 18th century, and it's more violent and ambitious in its dissonances than Haydn's tamer vision. But the dissonances mean something similar in Rebel's piece: they are primordial matter out of which the laws of harmony and melody emerge. **Arnold Schoenberg**'s Prelude to the *Genesis Suite*, from 1945, has a different objective. The whole point of Schoenberg's 12-tone technique was to order the total-chromatic universe that he had unleashed by 'emancipating the dissonance', as he put it. That means that Schoenberg's Prelude, 'And the Earth was without Form...', is, paradoxically, a highly formed formlessness, which instead of releasing a sublime abyss of chaotic energy, shapes and guides the forces of the universe to a place where matter and structure can take over. In the 21st century, **Thomas Adès**'s piano concerto, *In Seven Days*, presents a radically different idea. Adès doesn't present chaos as the opposite of creation, but as a place of musical potential, full of the essential building blocks from which creation can flow.

BERNSTEIN

Symphony No. 1, 'Jeremiah'

Bernstein's magnificently expressive war-time symphony, with its concluding 'Lamentation', finds a geometric, ritualistic counterpart in **Stravinsky**'s setting of Jeremiah's *Lamentations*, a piece called *Threni*, one of the most thrillingly, uncompromisingly austere of any of his later pieces, composed at the end of the 1950s. The most famous lament in all music is Dido's from **Purcell**'s opera *Dido and Aeneas*; and it's in the story of Dido and the Trojans that we can find another prophecy, to mirror the second movement of Bernstein's symphony. Cassandra's prophecy of the fall of Troy is turned into operatic vision by **Hector Berlioz** in *The Trojans*, and it's the inspiration behind one of the most virtuostic solo flute pieces in the repertoire, **Brian Ferneyhough**'s *Cassandra's Dream Song*.

MAHLER

Symphony No. 1

Those ethereal harmonics – those high, whistle-like string notes – that open this symphony, creating a sonic field in which the rest of the symphony will soon appear: well, what if these gossamer sounds weren't only an upbeat to a piece, but the *substance* of a whole work? That's what the Italian composer **Salvatore Sciarrino** does in his *Six Caprices* for solo violin, among the most extraordinary feats of compositional virtuosity of the late 20th century. Sciarrino's music is entirely made from harmonics, yet these spectral skeins of sound assume an unforgettable, tangible presence throughout, as if Sciarrino had turned these musical shadows into physical matter. **Ligeti**'s *Lontano* ('Distance') for orchestra isn't only about harmonics, but it's a piece that takes Mahler's idea of suspended animation into new dimensions of abyssally gigantic orchestral space. Where Mahler's sound-world is an embrace of the natural world, Ligeti shows us the darker side of the cosmos, in which musical space-time warps and curdles our listening perspective.