

The Proms Listening Service

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



ELGAR

Introduction and Allegro for Strings

The delirious density of Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*, its intermingling of solo voices, a string quartet and the whole string ensemble is a play of musical perspective to which British composers have long been drawn when they write for string orchestras. **Vaughan Williams's** *Tallis Fantasia* is another work that zooms in and out of different musical and spatial dimensions, dividing its strings into three separate but symbiotically connected ensembles. **Tippett's** Concerto for Double String Orchestra is one of his most viscerally thrilling pieces, in which the warp and weft of the multiple string parts creates a vertiginously exciting musical patterning. And **Britten's** *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* is another piece that turns its strings into an ensemble that can speak with one voice and with many, just as it creates a kaleidoscope of dramatic and musical characters from Frank Bridge's melody.

VENABLES/BARTÓK

Venables plays Bartók

... a title that only admits what is always true of musical works, which is that they are always remodellings of music that already exists – either the composer's own or somebody else's. That's how the whole darn musical comedy keeps on perpetuating itself, to paraphrase the cowboy-sage from the Coen Brothers' *The Big Lebowski*. Philip Venables's concerto wears its influences and tells its story with thrilling unabashedness; but here are some less obvious examples of composers reworking other people's and other cultures' music in new ways. **Mozart** rewrites music by Bach, Handel, Pergolesi and Michael Haydn in his *Requiem*; **Schubert** quotes and reworks Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' theme at the centre of the finale of his Ninth Symphony; and **Stravinsky** makes Lithuanian folk melodies the basis of his ballet *The Rite of Spring*, starting right at the beginning, with the solo bassoon line. In fact, *The Rite* could as easily be called *Stravinsky Plays Folk Music*.

PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 5

One of so many pieces from the 20th century that prove Schoenberg's point that there was still a lot of music to be written in C major – or, by extension, in any key! Prokofiev's symphonies, for all their sometimes savage sonic violence (the Third Symphony is the loudest of all), never stray from the gravity of tonality as their guiding principle. Here, by contrast, are sets of symphonies by composers who have attempted to find new musical compasses and charts by which to structure their music; symphonies in no key at all or many keys at the same time, which find a new way of handling time and harmony. **Peter Maxwell Davies's** symphonies – 10 in all – amount to a gigantic conspectus of how to create new and compelling kinds of symphonic momentum when you're not using keys in a conventional way, as do **Robert Simpson's** 11 granitically monumental works in the genre. And Danish composer **Per Nørgård's** eight symphonies are cosmically powerful, cataclysmically inventive and searchingly non-tonal pieces – you can hear the Third at the Proms on Monday.