



THE PROMS LISTENING SERVICE

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

ERKKI-SVEN TÖÖR

Flamma

Orchestral poems of fire, conflagrations of sonic splendour and terror such as **Erkki-Sven TööR's Flamma** are surprisingly common. Like those Hollywood film directors who spend whole lifetimes perfecting scenes of apocalyptic destruction that are the stock-in-trade of mainstream cinema, composers have been attracted like moths to the flame to depicting the elemental force of fire at work and at play in their scores. Perhaps that's because fire and flames share their evanescence with the sonic spectres of music, and both fire and music seem to be forces that are conjured from thin air. The Australian composer **Brett Dean** imagines a terrifying and overwhelming bush fire in his **Fire Music**, while **Scriabin's Prometheus** is an orchestral 'Poem of Fire' that takes us sensually, awesomely close to the searing heat itself. There are less apocalyptic evocations of fire in the scherzo-like **Fireworks of Stravinsky** and in the music of **Oliver Knussen**, whose **Flourish with Fireworks** is one of the most dazzling of all orchestral showpieces. Astonishingly, **Debussy** manages to make the piano keyboard self-combust with the colourful explosions of '**Feux d'artifice**' from his second book of *Préludes*.

MOZART

Sinfonia concertante

The **Chevalier de Saint-Georges** inspired **Mozart's Sinfonia concertante**: there's a trick that this most glamorous of all 18th-century composers, fencers, violinists and gentlemen at court pulls off in his own work for multiple string soloists and orchestra that Mozart must have stolen when he heard the piece in Paris.

It's the thrilling, helium-assisted ascent to the top of the instruments' registers just at the end of the finale, which takes your breath away when you hear it in performance. Don't thank Mozart, thank the Chevalier! But for all the dizzying delights of that movement, and the sumptuousness of the first, it's Mozart's second, slow C minor movement where you feel he is expressing something personal, tragic and searingly songlike. It's a vein of C minor confession you also hear in the slow movements of the **Piano Concerto No. 9 in E flat major, K271**, and in the dark C minor heart of the **22nd Concerto, K491**. But the lamenting, intertwining lines of the **Sinfonia concertante's** slow movement have a special sense of consolation amid the pain that makes this piece uniquely and devastatingly moving.

BRAHMS

Symphony No. 2

This symphony would be nothing without its trombones. Or not much, anyway ... yet the story of trombones in symphonies by this point in the 19th century is a surprising one. Mozart and Haydn never used them in their symphonies. For composers of the 18th century, trombones were symbols of the supernatural, reserved for sacred music and for operatic depictions of other realms, whether transcendent or hellish – that's exactly how **Mozart** uses his trombones in **The Magic Flute** and **Don Giovanni**. **Beethoven** brings them in as a *coup de théâtre* in his **Fifth Symphony**, where they have to wait out the first three movements before consecrating C major (along with the contra-bassoon) in the finale. But it was **Schubert** who first used them in a properly symphonic context, as an essential part of the

texture all the way through a piece: the '**Unfinished**' **Symphony** and the '**Great**' **C major** are suffused with the soft but authoritative tones of the trombones; **Schumann** also had Schubert's example in mind in the way he uses them in his four symphonies. And, after their essential role in the finale of Brahms's First, the trombones are symphonic interlopers no more: in the **Second Symphony**, they are the symbols of the work's deep emotional ambiguity.



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