



THE PROMS LISTENING SERVICE

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

FRANCISCO COLL

Mural

The battle for the soul of music, for the reason and rhyme of creativity itself, plays out in **Francisco Coll's** *Mural*: an existential conflict pitched between Apollo and Dionysus, the god of rationality and reason on one hand and the deity of ribald recklessness on the other. That mythic opposition has fuelled music for centuries, as has the debate about whether music is an art-form of feeling and emotion or of coolness, objectivity and intellect. For my money, it's both – and it always must be! But you hear vestiges of the conflict between Apollo and Dionysus in the wars between **Wagner** (supposed mystic conjuror of dark and dangerous feelings: listen to *Tristan and Isolde*) and **Brahms** (allegedly a cold-hearted intellectual rationalist: listen to the *Fourth Symphony*) at the end of the 19th century in Vienna. It's even there in the critical opposition between **Schoenberg** (creator of music that continues the tradition of expressive necessity in the 20th century: try the *First Chamber Symphony*) and **Stravinsky** (Apollonian master of masks, poses, postures and pretension: hear his ballet named for the god – *Apollo*). But if you really listen to all of those pieces, you'll experience the Dionysian feeling released by the pieces that are supposedly in Apollo's sphere, and you'll hear the geometry and calibration of emotion that's going on in the music of supposedly Dionysian abandon ... I told you music needs to be both at the same time!

THOMAS ADÈS

Polaris

Music to hear after experiencing *Polaris*: well, there are **Adès's** other major orchestral works,

including *Asyla*, *Tevot* and *Totentanz*, upon which *Polaris* builds and then explodes into new cosmic directions. And then try **Kaija Saariaho's** *Orion*. This is a work which does much more than attempt to depict a celestial constellation. Instead, Saariaho takes the images and ideas of Orion the hunter and the collection of stars and makes a 21st-century symphony from them, in music of ethereal beauty and galactically powerful energy. Adès talks about the way the notes he uses in *Polaris* are attracted to each other by forces of musical gravity and says his piece is an exploration of this species of fundamental musical material. Which reminds me of what Beethoven said about his (unfinished!) 10th Symphony: he told friends at the end of his life that he was composing this piece 'in order to create in it a new gravitational force'. What on earth would that have sounded like? We can only, and we must, wonder and imagine!

STRAVINSKY

The Rite of Spring

What on earth do you do after *that*? Whether you're a composer or a listener, *The Rite of Spring* presents a challenge, an inspiration – and a full stop. The victim has danced herself to death and Stravinsky has incarnated a music of a new kind of atavistic modernism. It's an experience that's rooted in the bowels of the Earth which yet seems to prophesy the war machines that were being built around Europe as the piece was premiered in Paris in 1913. This is the piece of music that has inspired more composers than any other in the 20th and 21st centuries (from the arch-modernist Elliott Carter to the Minimalist guru Steve Reich – and everyone in between). A bit like Beethoven's symphonies in the 19th century, it's a piece

whose power has proved hard to emulate even as it's impossible to ignore. Three works you need to hear, however, which come close to taking on the mantle of *The Rite of Spring's* overwhelming force for later decades: the Irish composer **Gerald Barry's** *Chevaux-de-frise*, a piece of such uncompromising, relentless dissonance and rhythmic power that it drives you on to the stakes of its violent musical intensity in a sonic analogy with the ancient instrument of war to which its title alludes; **Brian Ferneyhough's** *La terre est un homme*, a piece of such bewildering and thrilling complexity that *The Rite* seems like a Mozart minuet by comparison; and **Sir Harrison Birtwistle's** *Earth Dances*, music that goes deep into the strata and structure of sound to take the pulse of magma, to realise in sound the elemental forces that drive our Earth's cosmic dance.



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