



Abingdon School Music Society presents

A COMPOSERS' MASTERCLASS

with OA, EDMUND FINNIS



**COMPOSER AND COMPOSITION PROFESSOR AT
LONDON'S ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC**

WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH 2021

Programme

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| 1. | <i>Le Bouclier Canadien</i> | Andreas Lo |
| 2. | <i>The Mountain</i> | Nicholas Raptakis |
| 3. | <i>Piano Sonata</i> | Owen Ravden |
| 4. | <i>The Hunt</i> | Oliver Simpson |
| 5. | <i>Piano Sonata</i> | Oliver Smith |

Programme Notes

Andreas Lo - *Le Bouclier Canadien*

Having written many pieces for duets or single instruments, I have decided to try and compose an orchestral piece. The interweaving melodic and harmonic lines have always fascinated me and thus bore *Le Bouclier Canadien*. I always have a (bad) habit of changing the whole melodic structure, simply due to the fact that I suddenly dislike the section, hence there appears many short melodic sections throughout the piece. Slowly as the piece took form, it became much more nationalistic, especially with the thick homophonic textures. Having previously played Sibelius' *Finlandia*, I was eager to portray the juxtaposition of different atmospheres. The ternary form includes a fairly peaceful introduction describing the fairly laid back Canadian lifestyle, followed by a turbulent minor section that reflects the barbarous wildlife of Canada, before the return of the melodic line from the opening of the piece and ending with a pompous coda that highlights the patriotism.

Nicholas Raptakis – *The Mountain*

The Mountain is based on the idea of the rise and fall of a mountain, and how it is often insurmountable, and a lot can go wrong when climbing. There is no real narrative, and rather it is just written with these broad ideas in mind. The process actually began on a coach journey in the Italian dolomites, where I was going skiing last year. It was snowy and there were sheer cliffs that looked deadly yet really calm, and I wanted to write something down. On that holiday I wrote the 2 themes that make up the introduction of the piece, focusing on wind orchestration, as that was what I wanted to improve at the time. That was really it at the time, and I then did not work on the piece for almost 6 or 7 months, until I started having ideas for a larger work in the summer. From there it was composed pretty much in sections, with a lot of editing afterwards.

Owen Ravden – Piano Sonata

The idea from the piece stemmed from the study of piano sonatas in class. I wanted to emulate a Beethoven-esque style with regards to a stretched Sonata-form with interesting key juxtapositions. I started with the intention of writing a memorable first subject that I could then develop throughout the course of the piece. The second subject formed out of the first theme, as I wanted to show a clear contrasted subject that I could also allude to in the development section. A lot of the writing process was trial and error, figuring out the right harmonic colour for each section and being able to keep the writing idiomatic.

Oliver Simpson – *The Hunt*

I, being a string instrumentalist, wanted to write a piece for a string chamber group, to explore the limitations and advanced techniques of each of the instruments. I believe that the name 'The Hunt' perfectly portrays the changes of character, from the initial hunt, entering into an open, beautiful, serene section, and finishing with the final, more dramatic hunt.

I had been wanting to write a String Quintet for a while, and thought that this would be a good opportunity to have a go.

I started the composition process by writing my motif, my opening theme, with several developments, and my B theme. From this, I began to write my piece.

As I was writing, several new developments came to mind, leading me in a new direction with the piece, and meaning that I did not use some of my initial development ideas. I thoroughly enjoyed writing this piece, and look forward to writing more.

Oliver Smith – Piano Sonata

The main idea behind this piece is to present two contrasting sides of one character's personality. A solemn, dark side presented in the first subject, and a light, joyful side presented in the second subject. The transition section shows how a build up of powerful, almost angry emotions were able to break out into freeing the more joyful side of this personality, but by the end of the piece, the transition in the recapitulation is unable to push into the relative major key, and the piece falls back into a minor version of the second subject that sounds more aggressive. The introduction comes back 3 more times throughout the piece in different forms, each time feeling weaker and more fragile, until the codetta where the introduction feels particularly weak and unenergetic. This represents how throughout the course of the piece the character is broken down emotionally to a point where the piece ends back where it started, just with less drive and power.

When writing this piece, I started with the introduction, which I improvised on the piano. From there, I was able to come up with the subject melodies in Musescore, and I developed these melodies in my head, writing them into Musescore, and later adding accompaniments. I then spent a lot more time working on making the piece flow better, making the accompaniment fit properly, and finally adding dynamics, ornaments, tempo markings, and articulation to try and best express the emotions I wanted to convey with this piece.

EDMUND FINNIS, OA

Edmund Finnis is a “hugely gifted composer” (Sunday Telegraph) whose music has been hailed as “magical” (The Times), “iridescent, compelling” (The Guardian), “exquisite” (Sara Mohr-Pietsch, BBC Radio 3) and “ethereally beautiful” (Herald Scotland). His works are regularly performed and broadcast, both at home in the UK and internationally.

Finnis’ multifaceted output ranges from intimate music for soloists and duets to immersive electronic pieces, music for film, ensemble music, and works for large orchestra.

He has written music for some of the leading performers of his own generation (Benjamin Beilman, Mark Simpson, Víkingur Ólafsson, Clare Hammond, Oliver Coates, Daniel Pioro), and renowned ensembles such as Britten Sinfonia, BCMG and London Sinfonietta. His orchestral works have been performed by orchestras including the LSO, the BBC Scottish Symphony, and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago.

From 2013-16 Finnis was Composer-in-Association with the London Contemporary Orchestra. They gave numerous performances of his works and several new commissions, including *Across White Air* for solo cello with reverb, *Between Rain* for string orchestra, and the electronic piece *Colour Field Painting*, premiered on a summer evening on the top of London’s Primrose Hill.

Another significant association was formed with the London Sinfonietta who have performed, toured and recorded six of his works, including three that they commissioned: *Veneer*, *Unfolds* and *Seeing is Flux*.

Finnis studied at the Guildhall School with Julian Anderson. In 2012 he received a Paul Hamlyn Award, and in 2016 his violin concerto *Shades Lengthen* was shortlisted for an RPS Award. Since 2015 he has been a Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

The Air, Turning – an album of Finnis’ music – was released to critical acclaim in February 2019. Several of his pieces were used on the soundtrack to the Icelandic film, *Hvítur, Hvítur Dagur* (*A White, White Day*) which premiered at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival.