

Ensemble 10:10 **February 17 programme notes**

Samy Moussa has burst onto the music scene winning plaudits for his compositions and his conducting alike.

For his Ensemble 10:10 debut, he presents compelling composers rarely heard on these shores – Jacques Hétu (from Canada) and David Diamond (from the US) – but also serene music from the UK's Edmund Finnis. Moussa also introduces us to his acclaimed *Violin Concerto* with a UK premiere starring our very own Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra Leader Thelma Handy as soloist.

Moussa's music is described as 'dazzlingly coloristic', full of 'intoxicated harmonies and noisy energy' – this concert will encompass all that and more.

Samy Moussa, conductor

Award-winning Canadian-born, Berlin-based conductor and composer Samy Moussa has been described as a "strikingly original" composer who "paints a ravishing soundscape".

Born in Montréal in 1984, he studied with José Evangelista at the Université de Montréal and undertook postgraduate studies at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Munich. In 2010 he became Music Director of Ensemble INDEX in Munich. Moussa won the Ernst von Siemens Composers' Prize in 2013, and in 2017 was awarded the Paul Hindemith Prize for outstanding contemporary composers.

His work has been performed by many of the world's most prestigious orchestras including Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has also featured as artist in residence at Toronto Symphony Orchestra and works closely with l'Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal. Conductors who particularly champion his work include Stéphane Denève, Christoph Eschenbach, Hannu Lintu and Kent Nagano.

Recent seasons have seen him take up the baton to lead a range of repertoire from classical to contemporary with Bayerisches Staatsorchester, RSO Wien, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, MDR Sinfonieorchester Leipzig, Calgary Opera, Staatskapelle Halle and Zürcher Kammerorchester.

The 2022/23 season saw the world premiere of his *Trombone Concerto* with Orchestre National de Lyon and trombonist Jörgen van Rijen, as well as the European premiere of his Second Symphony with BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra at the BBC Proms. Moussa himself made appearances as conductor with Musikkollegium Winterthur and Edmonton Symphony Orchestra.

Forthcoming projects include the world premiere of his work for chorus and orchestra, *Antigone*, at the Dutch National Opera & Ballet in Amsterdam (conducted by Erik Nielsen), and of a new work commissioned by Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Manfred Honeck.

Thelma Handy, violin

Thelma Handy was appointed Joint Leader of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 2007 and has directed the Orchestra and appeared as soloist on many occasions.

Previously she toured worldwide as a member of the English Chamber Orchestra and worked extensively with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the London Mozart Players and the London Symphony Orchestra.

She has made guest appearances as leader with many orchestras including the Hallé, BBC Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National, City of Birmingham Symphony, Manchester Camerata and the Real Filharmonía de Galicia. Handy plays regularly with the French baroque group Orfeo 55 and is a member of the Pixels Ensemble with whom she has premiered many new works.

In 2017 she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Liverpool.

She is the Artistic Director of the Wirral Chamber Music Festival which she co-founded in 2020.

Ensemble 10:10

Ensemble 10:10 was founded in 1997 by members of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. It soon became integrated into the regular concert giving of Liverpool Philharmonic, able to draw on the talents of the whole orchestra as required. It is central to Liverpool Philharmonic's commitment to new writing and, in particular, supporting composers from Liverpool and the Northwest.

Ensemble 10:10 has performed in a variety of venues across Liverpool. As part of Liverpool Philharmonic's ground-breaking collaboration with the University of Liverpool, Ensemble 10:10 entered a new era in April 2022 – it became resident at the Tung Auditorium within the university's Yoko Ono Centre.

Edmund Finnis, *Between Rain*

Edmund Finnis is a hugely gifted composer whose music has been hailed as 'magical', 'iridescent, compelling' and 'ethereally beautiful'. His multifaceted output ranges from intimate music for soloists and duets, to works for large orchestra, film, and immersive electronic pieces. He is regularly performed and broadcast both in the UK and internationally.

Finnis, born in Oxford in 1984, 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. In 2015, he became a professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

Between Rain for string orchestra was commissioned by the London Contemporary Orchestra, where Finnis was composer-in-association, and received its world premiere at the Roundhouse in 2014. He explains: "The title comes from a quote from the poetic writings of the late American artist, Agnes Martin:

*Look between the rain
the drops are insular
Try to remember before you were born.*

"Her subtle grid paintings were particularly inspiring for me at the time of writing this piece."

The work opens with delicate splashes or shimmers shared amid the strings' upper registers, which sound gently in the ears. A second, more distinct and forceful theme appears, rippling in waves through the sections and the two motifs then move together in a textured, eddying and circling motion. It continues its subtle shift and shape in contrapuntal fashion, leading listeners through a soundscape which is at times gentle and at others hints at something altogether darker.

Listen to Edmund Finnis' [Between Rain](#) from the 2019 album *The Air, Turning*.

Samy Moussa, *Violin Concerto* (UK premiere)

Samy Moussa won Classical Composition of the Year in the 2021 Juno Awards in Canada for his *Violin Concerto* subtitled *Adrano*. The work was premiered in November 2019 by Andrew Wan and l'Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal in a performance conducted by Kent Nagano. Wan and the orchestra have also recorded the concerto.

The ancient fire god Adranus was believed to live beneath Sicily's Mount Etna and was worshipped by local people who founded a town in the shadow of the volcano in 400BC, calling it Adrano in his honour. Moussa was inspired to create his *Violin Concerto* after ascending Mount Etna and hearing the legend while on a trip to the Italian island.

The work is in four short movements. The first three are played without a pause, suggesting an almost ritualistic narrative. It begins with slow ascending chords from which the soloist emerges, rising to the instrument's upper registers, and the contrabassoon – capable of producing the orchestra's deepest notes – is prominent in the orchestration and stirs to life in a climax near its end. The second movement is a wary and quietly apprehensive accompanied cadenza (*senza misura* – or without meter) for violin. The third movement brings with it an eruption of energy and rhythm from both orchestra and soloist. And in the final movement, an epilogue, the fieriness subsides and quietness returns, with muted trumpets and solo violin soaring over a subtle accompaniment.

Listen to part three of Moussa's [*Violin Concerto Adrano*](#), conducted by the composer.

Jacques Hétu, *Symphony No 3* (UK premiere)

Joseph Robert 'Jacques' Hétu was born in Quebec in 1938, and studied piano, harmony and Gregorian chant at the University of Ottawa, going on to attend the Quebec Conservatoire and Tanglewood in Massachusetts.

He arrived in Paris in 1961, the same year he won the prestigious Prix d'Europe, Quebec's oldest music competition. There in the French capital, Hétu studied composition with Henri Dutilleux and analysis with Olivier Messiaen – who was particularly influential on his style – at the Paris Conservatory. Returning to Quebec in 1963, he forged parallel careers composing and teaching, becoming director of the music department at the Université du Québec de Montreal. In 1989 he was made a member of the Royal Society of Canada, and in 2001 named an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Hétu, who died in 2010, has been described as having a style that blended 'octatonicism' (a scale of alternating tones and semitones), chromaticism and a focus on repeated melodic units with neoclassical musical structures, or 'expressivity and angular rhythms within very traditional musical forms'. He himself described his music as incorporating "neo-classical forms and neo-romantic effects in a musical language using 20th-century techniques". And, he said, "I am first and foremost a melodist".

Symphony No.3, receiving its UK premiere tonight, was commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and composed in 1971. It was considered something of a watershed piece in development by its composer. Written in three movements, it has a driving energy.

The opening of the first movement, in *adagio* form, contains all the main motifs of the work and is followed by an *allegro* with two themes, the second of which – presented by clarinet – returns at the end of the last movement, giving the work a cyclical character. Its *adagio* second movement develops lyrical elements of the first movement through colours and tempo, while the final

movement unfolds in a rondo form and incorporates elements found in the adagio. Following a busy final 'tutti' the work's coda returns to the serene themes of the earlier movements.

David Diamond, *Music from Romeo and Juliet*

Leonard Bernstein described contemporary David Diamond as “a vital branch in the stream of American music” and praised the “seriousness, intelligence, weight, deftness, technical mastery, and sheer abundance” of his compositions. Diamond was indeed a prolific composer in a life which spanned most of the 20th century, and whose work spanned orchestral (including no fewer than 11 symphonies), chamber, concerto, piano and vocal pieces, along with one ballet.

Diamond was born in Rochester, New York, in 1915 to Yiddish-speaking immigrant parents from Galicia (modern day western Ukraine) and studied in Cleveland, New York state, and with the hugely influential Nadia Boulanger in Paris. There, he met Ravel and Roussel, and impressed Stravinsky with his early work. The young American went on to win three Guggenheim Fellowships and the Prix de Rome. He was later a Fulbright Professor, and a member of the faculty at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York.

His early compositions can be described as triadic, often with widely spaced harmonies, while later his style became more diatonic and modal.

Music from Romeo and Juliet, a concert suite composed in 1947 when he was still in his early 30s, explores the beauty and pathos in Shakespeare's tale of star-crossed lovers through five attractive and affecting short movements.

The *Overture*, an allegro maestoso, opens briskly with a snare drum roll and continues in ebullient, vigorous fashion which gives little hint of the moving scenes to come until its soft closing bars. Lines of solo violin and viola entwine tenderly at the start of the *Balcony Scene*, a tenderness which becomes more sonorous as the string chorus starts to sing. The movement's spare atmosphere evokes something of Vaughan Williams. In *Romeo and Friar Lawrence*, brass heralds the earnestness of the young lover, while the friar is conjured in dignified tones, and *Juliet and Her Nurse* is a dainty and delightful allegretto scherzando which skips buoyantly through the winds and pizzicato strings before giving way to a more lyrical theme. The final movement concerns itself with *The Death of Romeo and Juliet* and is marked 'sospirando' or sighing. A steady, melancholy lament is punctuated by a repeated rising brass motif – echoed by strings – and two gentle woodwind interludes, while in the fading final moments comes the muted toll of a bell.

Listen to David Diamond's [*Music from Romeo and Juliet*](#).