


## NOTES for MAY 3, 2018

There ought to be a collective noun for a large number of cellos gathered extra-symphonically, but so far I haven't found it. Richard Strauss thought the instrument quixotic, at least that was the voice that he chose to represent the Knight of the Doleful Countenance, but the antics of poor, crazed Don Quixote are probably not a fruitful place to be looking. Elgar, in his concerto, asked the instrument to sound *nobilmente* and that is certainly better; a nobility of cellos? It's a start. Perhaps this is the stuff of a WMCT competition?

The French composer Jean Barrière was born in 1707 and began his musical career as a viol player, but later switched to cello on which he became a noted virtuoso; "few could perform as well as he," said one contemporary. He was part of the musical establishment at Fontainebleau under Louis XV and was given royal permission to publish a number of his compositions – mostly sonatas for his own instrument. The fourth book from which today's composition is taken was published in Paris in 1740.

When a modernist composer includes the name of a virtuoso performer in the title of a composition, and when that performer is renowned for having extended the possibilities of what can be attempted on the instrument, you know you are in for fireworks. Following the comparative cultural thaw that occurred in Eastern European countries after Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin, Polish composers especially were quick to turn towards new sonorities, and new ways of structuring music. Penderecki's *Capriccio* for cello explores not just the sounds that you expect to come from the instrument, but a dizzying variety of unusual ones, many of them requiring novel kinds of notation to convey these to the performer.

The Canadian composer Jocelyn Morlock's music has been described as "airy but rhythmic, tuneful but complex" and with "uncanny yet toothsome beauty." She has won numerous awards and is currently the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's Composer in Residence. The composer kindly supplied the following notes about the piece on today's programme, which dates from 2010. "*The Violet Hour* is inspired by a moment in time: the time just before sunrise when, out of darkness, we first perceive the return of colour into the sky. The piece is written in several short sections; the first moody and tenebrous and the second a sneaky and tentative dance, influenced by Brazilian rhythms, which gradually ripens into an optimistic and lyrical conclusion. The work was commissioned by Joseph Elworthy and the Parisot Cellofest, and




is dedicated to Aldo Parisot and Joseph Elworthy."

J. S. Bach's Chaconne is the last movement of a larger work, the Partita in D minor, which in turn is one of a group of six works for solo violin without accompaniment. Reviewing the first publication of these works in 1805, Johann Reichardt said they were "perhaps the greatest example in any art form of a master's ability to move with freedom and assurance, even in chains." Violinists have always revered the work as an Everest to be conquered, but half an hour online will show you that it has also attracted just about every instrument and ensemble imaginable. Today's arrangement for four cellos is by Laszlo Varga, a cellist who was born in Budapest, survived a concentration camp in World War II and became the principal cellist of the New York Philharmonic in 1951. He formed a cello quartet soon after and arranged dozens of works for that ensemble. Whatever external changes the work is subjected to in the myriad arrangements, the structure remains the same: a short pattern of chords repeated 64 times with miraculous and ever changing decorations and elaborations.

Kelly-Marie Murphy's WMCT commission, *Coffee Will Be Served in the Living Room* is based on an event in the life of the painter Jackson Pollock the "volatile, angry, genius, with debilitating alcohol addiction." The artist had been filmed at work by the German photographer Hans Namuth and this had gone relatively smoothly, but at a celebratory dinner afterwards, organized by Lee Krasner, the artist's wife, Pollock became violently drunk and flew into a rage and upended the table with all its contents. As the guests sat, stunned, Krasner said, "Coffee will be served in the living-room...", and walked out. According to the composer, "the piece explores agitation, and the underlying sadness that seems to represent Pollock. The cellos sing, cry, scream, and shout, yet try to maintain normality."

*Bohemian Rhapsody* is an elaborate song by the British rock band Queen. Issued in 1975 as a part of the album 'A Night at the Opera,' it spent nine weeks at the top of the UK charts and brought the group international recognition. My colleague, Ken McLeod has demonstrated this song's indebtedness to the world of classical opera, parodying, as it does, "bombastic choruses, sarcastic recitative and distorted Italian operatic phraseology." McLeod's analysis takes the various sections of the song and provides the operatic equivalent for each. It begins with an *a cappella* opening section as overture, followed by an aria with the text beginning "Mama, just killed a man." This is interrupted "by a



transition to the middle part of the work which presents an Orpheus-like descent into the insanity of the underworld complete with “Thunderbolts and lightning, very very fright’ning . . .” The song ends with an abrupt transition “into a stereotypical heavy rock mode, with the words, ‘So you think you can stone me and spit in my eye’”.

*Bachianas Brasileiras No.5* is surely the best known example of a multi-cello work, with the added attraction of the solo voice. Villa-Lobos, who wrote nine pieces with this title between 1930 and 1945 for various combinations of instruments, described them as a ‘homage [to] the great genius of Johann Sebastian Bach ... [who I] consider a kind of universal folkloric source, rich and profound ... [a source] linking all peoples’. Today’s work is in two movements. The opening Aria (Cantilena) begins with a wordless vocalise from the soprano and this is followed by a contrasting middle section that is a setting of a poem by Ruth Valadares Corrêa before a return to the opening melody. The second movement is Dança (Martelo), and this sets lines by the poet Manoel Bandeira, evoking various species of birds, which the singer imitates in her melody.

*John Mayo*