

# Classical

Fiona Maddocks



**Park Lane Group**

Purcell Room, London SE1

That other stalwart champion of young artists, the **Park Lane Group**, opened its annual week of concerts at the Purcell Room (moving to St John's, Smith Square next year while the Purcell Room is being renovated). Monday's opening focused on the music of Robert Saxton, with additions from Thomas Adès, Robin Holloway, Thomas Hyde and György Kurtág. You could have constructed a

fascinating Venn diagram, or better an infographic, from the spirited audience in attendance, all of whom seemed to be interconnected. Both Holloway and Saxton have taught a generation of British composers, many of whom had turned out in warm support.

The pianist Gamal Khamis, who gave his Wigmore Hall recital at the age of 10, diverted for a few years to take a maths degree at Imperial College and is now a PLG young artist, was dazzling in Holloway's jubilant romantic miniature, *Ballade*, Op 90 No 1 (2000). He also played part of Adès's *Concert Paraphrase on Powder Her Face* and Saxton's glistening, subtle *Hortus Musicae* (2013), inspired by

the notion of a metaphysical garden. The Maxwell Quartet, formed at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and dedicated to expanding the repertoire, played Saxton's String Quartet No 3 (2011), capturing the contrasting character of each of the five movements with titles such as *Winter Light and Dance*. Ideas reveal and hide themselves in constant, delicate oscillation. In one (*Sea Ground*), he uses a passacaglia, mirroring the repeated yet changing action of the sea. This music, in this performance, had a mystery, delicacy and depth which made you want to hear it again immediately. What an exhilarating start to 2015.

## Concert

### PLG Young Artists 4

Purcell Room

★★★★☆

**M**arta Kowalczyk and Somi Kim's reading of Penderecki's Violin Sonata No 2 (1999) in the Park Lane Group series had ambition, ferocious intellectual and emotional engagement, savage beauty — and more. It was a great performance of a great work, powerfully argued and animated with a breathtaking range of colour, tone and inflection.

The sonata opens with what sounds like a cadenza, as if midway through the first movement of a concerto. Kowalczyk's bruising pizzicato and muscular bowing dissolved into a muted sheen as Kim's first furious iteration faded, leaving the faintest smudge of harmony suspended in the air. The sly dances and hiccupy sobs of the Allegretto scherzando were deftly drawn. In the central Notturmo the duo's dynamic control was formidable. The danse macabre rhythms of the Allegro and audacious, aching lines of the Andante were fearlessly and faultlessly executed.

Szymanowski's orientalist *Nocturne* and bodice-ripping *Tarantella* (1915) were inevitably diminished by what had preceded them. In the first half, Ensemble Matisse delivered the world premiere of Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *Cloud Movements*, the harmonies tilting wistfully towards Messiaen, the counterpoint neat, alongside Poul Ruders's ungrateful *Vox in Rama* (1983) and Berg's 1935 arrangement of the Adagio from his *Kammerkonzert*. The clarinettist Rozanne Le Trionnaire, violinist Francesca Barritt and pianist Ellena Hale sounded relieved to be in more romantic territory, albeit post-romantic. All three sounded happiest in Kenneth Hesketh's breezy *Cautionary Tales* (2002). Their advice is sound: wash properly; be careful in love; don't suck your thumb.

Anna Picard

## Concert

### PLG Young Artists 5

Purcell Room

★★★★☆

**O**n paper, the final offerings in the Park Lane Group's annual beauty parade of young musicians didn't suggest we were in for much of a party. A solo cellist. A solo viola player. A solo pianist. Yet despite the absence of communal music-making, some fun and high spirits still turned up, mostly in the energetic performances of Dominic Degavino, who sprung toward the Steinway piano looking all of 15.

Actually he's 19 and the possessor of hands of steel, able to handle the relentless cascades in Ligeti's *etude L'escalier du diable*, the intricate rigours of Robert Simpson's Beethoven Variations or the jumping-jack rhythms of David Matthews's Op 47 sonata, all without turning a hair. A nuance shortage made Matthews's five-minute Wagner cut-up *A Shorter Ring* more mechanistic and less amusing than necessary, but Degavino's a pianist worth watching.

I'd also be happy to follow cellist Ariana Kashefi, especially when she's playing music as eloquent as Deborah Pritchard's PLG commission *From Night* — ten minutes of sustained growth and chiaroscuro at its most gripping when exploring the cello's lowest register. Kashefi's darkly honeyed tones and general proficiency also made pleasurable work of Walton's late Passacaglia and Matthews's neatly turned triptych *Journeying Songs*. What this party needed was the excitement of the rough, the confrontational and the avant-garde. That's never on offer from Matthews, Friday's "frontline composer", though alongside his good manners feelings still throb. We felt them in the ruminative *Winter Journey* and the pungent variations of *Darkness Draws In*, confidently despatched by Diana Mathews on a classy and resonant viola.

Geoff Brown

arts

Classical

PLG Young Artists

Purcell Room, London

★★★

The Park Lane Group's annual New Year series – a week of concerts showcasing young and emerging artists – got off to a promising start this year with some very fine performances from the Maxwell Quartet and the pianist Gamal Khamis. The highlights – at least in terms of performance standards – came from Thomas Hyde's String Quartet and from Robin Holloway's charming and elusive *Ballade*.

Hyde is not a well-known composer and this was only the second performance of his String Quartet, which was composed in 2010. It is a substantial work that makes imaginative use of delicate string quartet textures and draws its formal sense from the interplay between atonal and tonal techniques, creating a fascinatingly robust but subtle kind of dynamism. The Maxwells gave a clear and impassioned reading of the work, which remained alive to the score's delicate lyricism and need for metrical control.

The same interpretative authority was less in evidence for Robert Saxton's Third String Quartet (premiered by the Ardittis in 2011), a superbly crafted work that navigates, like much of Saxton's music, a wobbly bridge between tightly maintained and clearly articulated (mostly traditional) formal processes and the sense it conveys that everything might suddenly spiral off into unchained flights of ecstasy. The Maxwells did well with the contrasting inner movements, but seemed less sure-footed in the colliding scale motifs of the main outer movements.

Gamal Khamis also seemed slightly ill at ease navigating Saxton's recent and rather magical piano suite, *Hortus Musicae*, but gave a fluid and nicely turned account of the Holloway, luxuriating in its Fauré-esque ambiguities.

It's a shame he didn't continue with one of the work's partner pieces, but moved instead to the second half of Thomas Adès's *Concert Paraphrase on Powder Her Face* – an impressive technical display, to be sure, but somewhat out of place.

**Guy Dammann**

Series continues until Friday.

Box office: 0844-847 9910.

Classical

PLG Young Artists

Purcell Room, SE1

★★★★☆

There's a retro look to this year's Park Lane Group Young Artists series, in which recent conservatoire graduates perform

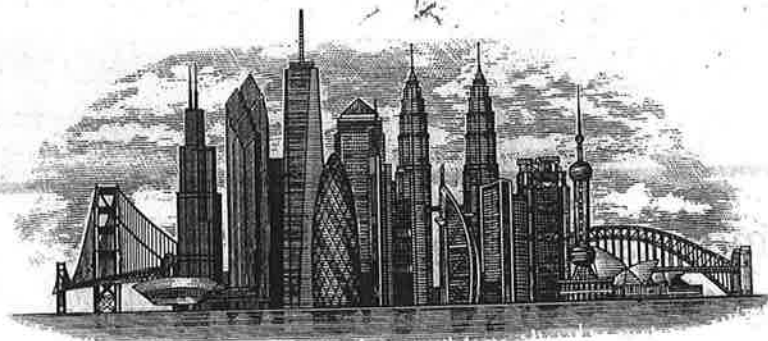
supposedly adventurous music. All five featured "frontline composers" are older than me. The five "linked composers", chosen by the "frontline composers" because they feel an affinity, are even wrinklier; in fact two died well before I was born.

That leaves the five "frontline choice" composers to represent the younger generation and this year they are a conservative bunch as well. I used to admire the series for the uncompromising way it compelled young musicians to learn and deliver the bracing avant-garde scores of our time. Now it seems duller and safer.

It didn't help that Monday's main concert featured three composers — Robert Saxton as "frontline", Robin Holloway as "linked" and Thomas Hyde as "choice" — who are Oxbridge to their fingertips, with all the virtues (smooth craftsmanship and intellectual density) and vices (smooth craftsmanship and intellectual density) implied. Even so, both Saxton's Third String Quartet and Hyde's Philip Larkin-inspired String Quartet could have been far more gripping if the Maxwell Quartet had played them a little less safely and a lot more passionately. Both traced a mood curve from unease to despair or breakdown and back again to equilibrium or stoic acceptance — but that, and the profuse incidental details supplied by each composer, could have been made so much more vivid.

A similar expressive reticence stopped Holloway's *Ballade* — a cleverly askew homage to the neurotic piano epics of Chopin, Schumann and Brahms — from taking wing in the hands of Gamal Khamis. Khamis has formidable keyboard skills yet nowhere did I feel him committing heart and soul, as opposed to flashing digits, to the music.

**Richard Morrison**



# FINANCIAL TIMES

'Without fear and without favour'

THURSDAY 8 JANUARY 2015

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

### Park Lane Group Young Artists New Year Series

Purcell Room, London

★★★★

Hannah Nepil

A flock of cutting-edge composers surrounded by several empty seats: should we expect anything else of the Park Lane Group Young Artists New Year Series? OK, it's hardly Lady Gaga. But this annual contemporary classical music fest showcases young instrumentalists and singers of considerable talent. It deserves to be witnessed by more than a scattering of key musicians and their inner circle.

The opening concert of this year's series, at the Purcell Room, made that point neatly, most of the time. Curated by the composer Robert Saxton, it certainly put the performers through their paces. The Maxwell Quartet looked ready to explode with the strain of concentration as they picked their way through Saxton's by turns earthy, by turns ethereal, and savagely difficult String Quartet No 3. They needn't have looked so tense. Nothing was amiss, except for the sense of excitement that comes with loving and internalising a piece of music, rather than merely conquering it.

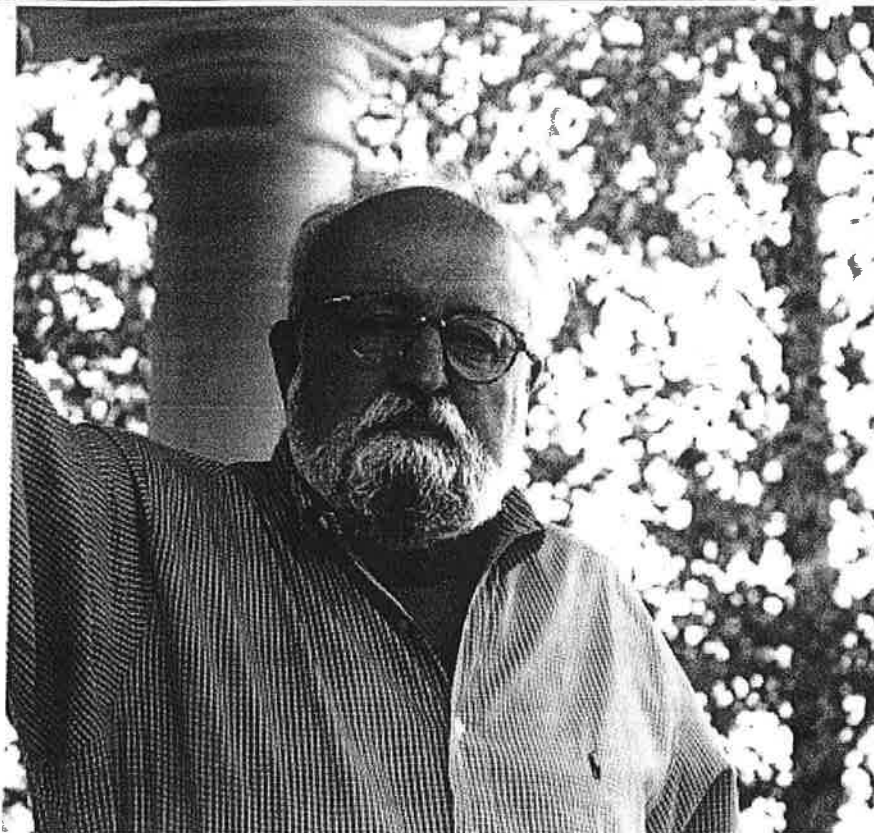
A similar depth of focus marked Kurtág's *Microludes* for String Quartet, a set of highly-charged fragments, some over within a few seconds. And Thomas Hyde's String Quartet, Op 10, was dispatched with crystalline delicacy. But the piece lurches from angst to depression and back again, with more than a sprinkling of *longueurs*.

The highlight of the evening was

pianist Gamal Khamis, whose sensitivity and imagination shone out of his three performances. He captured the blend of lyricism and caprice that characterises Robin Holloway's *Ballade*, Op 90 No 1, a piece that starts purposefully, then loses momentum. But Saxton's meditative *Hortus Musicae* provided a stronger platform for this pianist's talent. It describes a metaphysical, multi-faceted garden, as distinctive for its silences as it is for its sounds. Khamis fully understood that, while making the most of every colour, play of light and scent.

Most memorable of all was the Concert Paraphrase on Thomas Adès's 1995 opera *Powder Her Face*. We heard the final two movements, more than enough to taste the brilliance of Adès's music, and the tawdry world it so wryly conjures up. Here it sounded almost like a sinister clown dance — all manic grins and demented, staring eyes. And still it raised a nervous chuckle.

[southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)



Master of the avant garde: Krzysztof Penderecki was honoured in the latest New Year Series concert

By John Allison

5:32PM GMT 08 Jan 2015

## The Daily Telegraph

est. Morning Post

 Comment

Balancing somewhere between worthiness and worthwhileness, the **Park Lane Group's long-running New Year Series** promotes young artists through the music of mostly middle-ranking modernists. It's not often these days that we see a major composer here in the drab old Purcell Room, but the PLG pulled off something of a coup by getting Krzysztof Penderecki along for two concerts and a masterclass.

Nor is it often that we hear anything of the **81-year-old Penderecki's** earliest music, written before he made a name with his big avant-garde works of the Sixties. But the Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano (1953) proved a highlight of this first Penderecki-focused programme, and also served as an ideal vehicle for the violinist Michael Foyle and pianist Maxim Stsura, who played it with compelling conviction. Though the hauntingly elegiac slow movement may have been written under the spell of Bartók, it shares with the whole work an emotional honesty, and the duo also found arresting vigour in the outer movements.

Penderecki was perhaps less well served by the evening's other ensemble, the Kaleidoscope Saxophone Quartet, who chose to play an arrangement of his Quartet for Clarinet and String Trio. Excellent players though they are, once they got past the melancholy opening this hardly seemed like the right medium for such an ethereal work, and the final Abschied felt like a long goodbye.

The evening's other featured composer, Paul Patterson, was better represented in his early Diversions for saxophone quartet. Its three breezy movements allowed the Kaleidoscope players to show off all their colours, not least in the pensively jazzy Blowing Blue. Patterson's playful use of Rule, Britannia! in its finale was a reminder of his penchant for clever quotations, already heard in ppp (Penderecki Party Piece) for violin and piano: here he weaved strains of Happy Birthday to You into a work written in celebration of the Polish composer's 80th birthday, while seemingly also paying tribute to the virtuosity of an earlier Polish master of violin writing, Henryk Wieniawski.

The rest of the programme was a typical PLG mix. The Foyle-Stsura duo showed their mettle in Lutoslawski's Partita, mixing virtuosity with delicate interplay, and did their best with the generic writing of Anthony Powers's In Sunlight. The saxophonists found subtle intensity in Judith Bingham's Lace-making, but switching to baritone and bass instruments for Sam Quaternmaine-Smith's growling Tone Chasms, they evoked a family of burping warthogs.

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**Concert**  
**PLG Young Artists 3**  
**Purcell Room**  
 ★★★★★

**A**n evening at the annual Park Lane Group Young Artists New Year series can be a somewhat austere affair, with neglected newish works being strenuously promoted and young musicians earnestly desperate in their attempts to catch the ear of critics and agents.

On my allotted night, however, I felt smiles crinkling at the corners of my mouth at several points. This was thanks in large part to the presence of Paul Patterson as the day's "Frontline Composer". Two pieces offered a platform each for the evening's two ensembles. First came the Scottish violinist Michael Foyle and the Estonian pianist Maksim Stsura — a duo since 2012 and who, on this showing, revealed themselves to be more interested in risk-taking than in studied perfection.

This added greatly to the enjoyment of Patterson's *ppp* (*Penderecki Party Piece*) receiving its UK premiere. It's an eight-minute romp during which

**“**  
**Penderecki was**  
**present to hear**  
**the tribute**

*Happy Birthday* makes tentative and teasing appearances amid winks in the direction of jazz, elegy and even Bartókian dances. And its dedicatee was present too: Krzysztof Penderecki, whose 80th birthday the piece had celebrated just over a year ago, stood forward to congratulate Foyle and Stsura on their performance of his 1953 Sonata No 1 for violin and piano: fierce and fiery in its leapfrogging first movement, haunting in the violin's Andante musings. Patterson's other featured work was his 1976 *Diversions* for Saxophone Quartet — the ensemble in question being the feisty Kaleidoscope Saxophone Quartet. Each of the work's three movements is named after a different "wind", which in turn reflects different aspects of the saxophone's character. *Gusty* was played as though its aggressive virtuosity were deep within these players' fingers and lungs; the opening alto solo of *Blowing Blue* sidled into languid jazz idiom, and *Sea Breeze* was an entirely irresistible and crafty send-up of *Rule, Britannia!*

**THE**  **TIMES**

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And, as the evening's "Composer's Choice", Samuel Quartermaine-Smith, a pupil of Patterson, brought a whole new dimension to the idea of "wind" in the multiphonics and percussive, farting impulses of his *Tone Chasms* for three baritone saxophones. For the rest, I particularly enjoyed Judith Bingham's 2004 *Lace-making* for saxophone quartet, a quaint and quirky fugal patterning of melodic threads, originally written for female choir.  
**Hilary Finch**

**THE**  **TIMES**

THE TIMES | Thursday January 8 2015

**Concert**  
**PLG Young Artists 2**  
**Purcell Room**  
 ★★★★★

**I**n the thickets of the PLG Young Artists Series, with its hit-and-miss spread of music, some of which goes back a century and some just a few months, and all of it connected via the impenetrable "frontline", "linked" and "frontline choice" composer matrix, a cast-iron rule is to play every piece as if you really love it. The Borealis Saxophone Quartet played ball impeccably.

They opened with Jonathan Dove's *Tuning In* (1995), which begins with the players at four corners of the hall, each of them on the alto saxophone. As the players return to the platform, they pick up their own saxes — alto now playing against baritone, tenor and soprano — and the piece explores the dynamics of a conversation. When it comes to this sort of instruments, quite literally a lot of hot air emerges and *Tuning In* is another testament to Dove's musical magpie tendencies, but

also to his theatrical nous.

More impressionistic, but not over blurry, were Darren Bloom's new *Borexino-Borealis* and Tom Harrold's *Gentle Skies* (2013). The former, inspired by subatomic physics and the hunt for the neutrino, featured a lot of blowing rather than playing — at times the quartet sounded more like four angry scuba divers — but the almost mystical, blaring arrival of the elusive particle had a genuine frisson, while Harrold's moodpiece flickered in shades of blue, without succumbing — given the instrumentation — to blues.

The Alauda String Quartet had a gnarlier time of it. It was terrific to hear Bartók's String Quartet No 2, music that throbs with tangled emotion, and then in the extraordinary finale seems to evaporate entirely. This was a brave, not always cogent performance, with the nutty tone of viola player Rhoslyn Lawton standing out. The foursome also tackled Joseph Horowitz's Fourth String Quartet, or Bartók meets British pastoralism, which sounded more studied than felt, and Adam Coombs's brief, juddery String Quartet No 1, apparently evoking a street in Bristol.  
**Neil Fisher**

## Park Lane Group, Southbank Centre, review: 'dense and difficult'

The Park Lane Group is a charity that exists to provide a platform for young performers. Ivan Hewett hoped for more youthful energy and surprise

★★★



The Maxwell Quartet

By Ivan Hewett

2:12PM GMT 06 Jan 2015

**The Daily Telegraph**  
and Morning Post

It's not a group, and it has nothing to do with London's swankiest street. The Park Lane Group is a charity that exists to provide a platform for young performers, and in the first week of every year it puts on a week-long showcase at the Southbank Centre.

You would think such a series would be bursting with youthful energy and surprise. In fact there are few more sedate and formulaic events in the musical calendar. Each evening there are two sets of performers, who are asked to choose works by a handful of specified living composers, some well-known (this year Thomas Adès is in the spotlight), some less so. The pieces tend to be tough, dense and difficult – which is fine in itself, but to hear six in succession is a bit too much of a good thing.

This tightly-corseted format does have one advantage – it makes the really characterful and gifted performers shine all the more brightly, like a gaudy lamp in a dull room. The Maxwell Quartet from Scotland certainly had their moments. They launched the evening with the third string quartet by

Robert Saxton, a composer who decades ago leaned towards modernism. These days he writes music of a rhapsodic, very English modalism, sometimes breaking into a dancing lightness that dimly recalls Michael Tippett, though without his fierce ecstatic quality. The performance was affectionate and warm, if not always perfectly focused.

The quartet by the 36-year-old Thomas Hyde also shone in their hands, though even their persuasive advocacy couldn't turn the music's frustratingly wayward course into a convincing narrative. Their third piece, György Kurtág's *Microludes* was the evening's masterpiece, but it needed a sharper and more finely-tuned performance to reveal the music's haunted, moon-struck beauty.

So a mixed bag, musically. As were the three pieces played by pianist Gamal Khamis, but the experience of hearing them was much more vivid because the performances were so remarkable. Khamis's razor-sharp mental and physical control was evident in Saxton's gently rhapsodic *Hortus Musicae*, but it really shone out in Thomas Adès's brilliant concert paraphrase of his youthful opera *Powder her Face*. One could relish the music's grotesquely over-the-top sleaze, because the performance was so clean. In Robin Holloway's *Ballade* the obsessive galloping rhythms were beautifully controlled, and the way the music constantly darted in and out of Schumann's romantic world was caught with mesmerising exactitude.

**The Park Lane Group New Year Series continues at the Southbank Centre, London until January 9. Tickets: 0844 847 9910**

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