



FRIBBINS

Gommecourt

Cello Concerto • Folk Songs

Sebastian Comberti *cello*

Saša Mirković *viola*

Johan Randvere *piano*

London Mozart Players / Jürgen Bruns

Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra

Robertas Šervenikas

Peter FRIBBINS (b. 1969)

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (2024)

[19:30]

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|--------|
| [1] | I. Prelude: Andante innocente | [5:40] |
| [2] | II. Aria: Larghetto | [5:41] |
| [3] | III. Interlude – | [1:04] |
| [4] | IV. Toccata: Allegro marcato | [7:05] |

Sebastian Comberti *cello*

London Mozart Players / Jürgen Bruns

Gommecourt (symphony for orchestra with piano obbligato) (2024)

[28:35]

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|-----|--|--------|
| [5] | I. Gommecourt Wood: Marcato decisivo e pesante | [7:05] |
| [6] | II. Hébuterne, France: Adagio | [8:28] |
| [7] | III. 'Wie schmeckt der coffee süße': Allegro moderato (scherzando) | [5:22] |
| [8] | IV. La Vierge penchée – La basilique d'Albert, France: Estatico | [7:40] |

Johan Randvere *piano*

Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra / Robertas Šervenikas

Folk Songs (viola and chamber orchestra) (2022)

[14:19]

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|------|--|--------|
| [9] | I. Prelude on <i>Bugail Yr Hafod</i> : Adagio | [5:09] |
| [10] | II. Fugue after <i>Ajde Jano</i> : Scherzando | [3:48] |
| [11] | III. Fantasia on <i>Azt gondoltam eső esik</i> : Andante | [5:22] |

Saša Mirković *viola*

London Mozart Players / Jürgen Bruns

Total Timing:

[62:39]

Peter FRIBBINS

Cello Concerto • Gommecourt • Folk Songs

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra

My Cello Concerto is a radical reworking of material from a sonata commissioned by Raphael Wallfisch and John York in 2005. This allowed me to be more expansive and better able to articulate the material with orchestral colour. The use of a small orchestra of single woodwinds, two horns, trumpet, and strings, enables a range of colours, yet also a good balance of sonorities, so the solo cello is not overwhelmed.

The *Prelude* movement opens with a soaring solo cello melody, accompanied with high writing in the strings, before the music gradually descends to become more anchored. Much of the writing derives from a long expressive melody accompanied by a recurring quintuplet figure, these two elements being regularly swapped between cello and orchestra.

The second movement *Aria* is more passionate and builds to writing that sounds almost violent in its declamatory intensity. Finally, the orchestra subsides, and the solo cello is left with plaintive and reflective musings in a short solo *Interlude* that prepares the way for the last movement.

The *Toccatà* is the quickest and most energetic of the movements, featuring rapid toccata-like writing, regularly swapped between solo cello and orchestra, although not

without slower, more reflective episodes, especially in a short cadenza for solo cello towards the end of the movement. But these sensitive musings are eventually swept aside by a passionate orchestral tutti, leading to a return of the toccata material to end the concerto loudly and unequivocally.

Gommecourt (symphony for orchestra with piano obbligato)

One evening in 2018, following a concert in London, I sat with my friends Ben Sayevich and Horst Kolo. Since it was the centenary of the end of the First World War, our conversation turned to this topic, and the way it had intersected our own family histories. Ben's grandfather had fought for the Tsar, Horst's grandfather for the Kaiser, and mine for the King.

I had always known something of my grandfather Thomas Fribbins's experiences in northern France and Belgium in the Royal Fusiliers, but the conversation got me thinking that I really should make the effort to visit some of the places he had been, especially since I now had sons in their early 20s, the same age that Tom had been when he had fought at the battles of the Somme, Passchendaele and Cambrai. I recalled my own parents taking me to see my grandfather's name on the white marble memorial to the 'Staff who fell in the Great War' at Gamages Department store in London – just before it was demolished in the mid-1970s. Except that... he hadn't actually died. When

he returned after the war, seeking his old job, one of his old colleagues fainted, believing he had seen a ghost.

One of the bloodiest of the battles of the famous Somme Offensive in northern France on 1 July 1916 was at the village of Gommecourt, near the town of Albert. Tom Fribbins fought here and somehow miraculously survived, although wounded and shipped back to England. By 1916, Gommecourt Wood was the furthest western territory held by the German army, so there was no way they were going to let it go – they had even named a tree at the furthest western point ‘The Kaiser’s Oak’, and it was one of the most heavily defended points on the Somme. General Haig’s generals advised against an attack here, but his aim was to tie up the German artillery and draw their fire away from other parts of the Somme battle as a diversion. To serve this purpose, he didn’t much seem to care how many British lives were lost.

Consequently, the attrition rate in Tom’s regiment of the Royal Fusiliers was appalling. The battle began in the morning, with his A-company being directed ‘over the top’ in the afternoon, by which time the Germans were beginning to organise a powerful counterattack and the conditions impossible. In the Regimental History (1929), Major Grey wrote: ‘The enemy’s standing barrage on No Man’s land had reached its greatest intensity. Shells shrieked and whined through the air. The ground rocked under the repeated explosions; and towering columns of earth and greenish smoke sprang skyward. The noise was deafening; and the atmosphere reeked with the

acrid fumes of high explosive. From the grim salient of Gommecourt Park on the left machine guns in enfilade swept the slope leading up to the German position, vicious spirals of earth marking where the bullets fell... Few men could pass through such a galling fire unscathed. Some little time elapsed before ‘A’ Company was ready to make its attempt. At last the men rose from their trenches, and without faltering advanced into the teeth of the barrage. The ranks slowly melted in the intense fire; and by 3pm all was over. Of five officers and 97 other ranks of this company, who left the shelter of the British trenches that afternoon, only 10 returned unwounded.’

A 100 years on, the battlefield appears peaceful and idyllic, with beautiful skies, trees and fields, but for an old gnarled British machine-gun post and a regular ‘crop’ of old bits of metal and shell casings from the fields.

My orchestral work *Gommecourt*, which takes a four-movement symphonic form, draws upon my visits to the region with my sons Alexander and Samuel, the area’s history, and memories of my grandfather, Tom Fribbins (1894–1980). Scored for full orchestra, it features a piano obbligato which offers moments of reflection and commentary. Although not intended to be programmatic or offer a narrative, the movements have subtitles that draw upon some of the locations. The first is Gommecourt Wood, the shape of which seems barely to have changed in the last 100 years, and which still seems to occupy a brooding presence in the landscape – you can still see some of the old German trenches criss-crossing through it, with bits

of old barbed wire and twisted scraps of rusting iron.

The second movement is titled *Hébuterne*, now a peaceful French village – in 1916 it was a base for British troops and shelled to the point of near-obliteration. Tom's battalion was based here in the weeks before the Battle of the Somme, and it was from the trenches to the north of the village that they tried to advance on Gommecourt across no-man's-Land. Hébuterne was also the site of the Field Dressing Station, completely overwhelmed on that day of 1 July, and which therefore became, perhaps inevitably, the beautifully kept Commonwealth war cemetery that lies there today. Many of Tom's friends and comrades are buried here.

The third movement is intended to remind us that all humankind is essentially the same, capable of kindness, generosity and compassion as well as acts of destruction and barbarity. The wounded and dying of Tom Fribbins's battalion lay in No-Man's Land of Gommecourt through the first night, and on the next day the Germans arranged for a two-hour truce to allow for wounded soldiers to be rescued from the field. The returning wounded reported that the German soldiers had come during the night to give them coffee. This movement incorporates a musical quotation from J.S. Bach's *Coffee Cantata* – not only to represent something of the German soldiers and their compassion but also invoking Bach's sense of timeless grace and humanity – our universal humanity.

The fourth and final movement is titled *La Vierge penchée*

– *La basilique d'Albert* and partly reflects on the remarkable story of the 'Leaning Virgin' at the top of the church tower at Albert, a striking and inspiring statue, in beautiful gold leaf, of Mary holding aloft the infant Christ – glinting in the sun for miles around – as it still does today. Much of Albert was destroyed by shelling in the First World War, and the church was severely damaged, but the famous golden statue refused to fall, leaning dramatically at an angle for much of the war.

One of the objects I have from my grandfather is his pocket 'Service Bible' which all British troops carried – his one spattered on the front with blood. At the end are some English hymns, beautifully harmonised in four parts. Whilst intrigued by the somewhat surreal idea of going into battle armed with beautifully notated music, I warm to the broader metaphysical and spiritual context, and my music incorporates phrases from the famous English setting of Psalm 23, with its apposite lines: 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me...'

Folk Songs (for viola and chamber orchestra)

Folk Songs is a three-movement work for solo viola and chamber orchestra of flute, bassoon and strings. Each movement draws upon folk music from a different country. The first movement reworks material originally from a viola and piano piece commissioned by the Presteigne Festival in Wales in 2007 and premièred by the British violist Sarah-Jane Bradley. It draws upon a Welsh folk tune whose words translate approximately in English as 'When I was a Shepherd'.

For Saša Mirković, the middle movement is a fugue in 7/8 whose subject is based on more lively music, the folk song *Aj de Jano*. Originating from southern Serbia, and probably 19th century, the song is essentially an exhortation to dance, at all costs! In English: 'C'mon Jana, c'mon honey, let's sell the horse [...] just to dance! [...] let's sell the house, just to dance!' (and so on).

Music for the final movement is derived from a viola and piano piece written for the Hungarian violist Enikő Magyar, with an old Hungarian folk song, probably medieval, at its heart: *Azt gondoltam eső esik, Pedig a szemem könnyezik* (I thought it rains, but my eyes are wet with tears...).

The complete work was premièred by Saša Mirković and Ensemble Metamorphosis in Belgrade, Serbia in 2022.

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Peter Fribbins was born in London in 1969. After winning a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, he studied with Hans Werner Henze in London and Italy, and then at Royal Holloway and Nottingham universities. His works are noted for their expressive and dramatic qualities, but also their attractive memorable melodic lines, and a style developed from a keen awareness of musical tradition. Fribbins's music is regularly performed, broadcast, and recorded, internationally. As well as the works on this disc, other major recorded works include the *Violin Concerto* (recorded by Philippe Graffin, Robertas Šervenikas, and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra), the *Piano Concerto*, three string quartets (two recorded by the Allegri and Chilingirian quartets), two piano trios (recorded by the Angell Trio and the Rosamunde Trio) and several sonatas and other chamber works. Many of his pieces draw upon extramusical subjects, for instance with poetry in the wind quintet, *In Xanadu*, the flute sonata *Porphyria's Lover*, the second piano trio *Softly in the Dusk*, and *String Quartet No. 1, 'I Have the Serpent Brought'*. Peter Fribbins is Professor of Music at Middlesex University, Artistic Director of the London Chamber Music Society, based at St John's Waterloo, and co-director of Fenlandia, an annual series of events that celebrates the culture, history, and environment of the East Anglian fens.

peterfribbins.com

Cellist **Sebastian Comberti** studied in Italy with Amedeo Baldovino and with Derek Simpson and Sidney Griller at the Royal Academy of Music. A founder member of the Bochmann Quartet, in 1983 he became principal cello with the London Mozart Players, also appearing with them frequently as soloist. His work in historically informed performance has resulted in frequent

appearances as principal cello with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and as soloist with the Hanover Band. Research into early cello repertoire has led to numerous recordings. In 2001 Comberti founded Cello Classics, a label devoted to recordings of rare repertoire, releasing albums of unknown sonatas by Boccherini and others, and concertos by Haydn.



Pianist **Johan Randvere** is one of the brightest stars of the Estonian younger generation of musicians. Performing regularly both as a soloist and a chamber musician, Randvere has appeared in New York's Carnegie Hall, in Moscow, and at numerous venues throughout Europe. As a soloist he has performed with many orchestras and won numerous

competitions, including first prize at the 'Klaviermusik' in Vilnius (2008), first prize and Grand Prix at the Catania Music Competition in Italy (2012), first prize and Grand Prix at the 'Andrea Baldi' International Piano Competition in Italy (2014), and numerous other awards.



Saša Mirković is one of the most prominent Balkan violists, known for his charisma, virtuosity, and innovative spirit. A soloist, chamber musician, educator, and artistic leader of Ensemble Metamorphosis, he performs worldwide – from Carnegie Hall to the Sydney Opera House. His repertoire spans baroque to contemporary music, often blending classical with jazz, ethno, and multimedia elements. An award-winning

artist, he has premièred over 120 works for viola, greatly enriching the instrument’s literature. Mirković is Professor of Viola at the Faculty of Philology and Arts in Kragujevac, and a passionate promoter of Serbian music, who continues to shape the future of music through bold, genre-defying artistic leadership.



Jürgen Bruns is artistic director and chief conductor of Kammerphilharmonie Berlin, and since 2019 the chief conductor and music director of the Prussian Chamber Orchestra. After some years as chief conductor of the KOS Ljubljana and from his tireless work in contemporary music, he is now a sought-after conductor throughout Europe and Asia, having toured widely and conducted many different orchestras. His concerts

are frequently broadcast, with more than 40 live broadcasts over the last ten years. As a German conductor, Jürgen Bruns's recordings of works by composers who were once ostracised, of expressionist works, and of the classical modern era, are of particular importance. He has recorded widely and has a discography of more than 30 albums.



Robertas Šervenikas studied in Saint Petersburg and made his conducting début with the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra in 1993. His international career was launched in 1997 when Rostropovich invited him to conduct at the Évian Festival. Guest conductor of the Bavarian State Opera in Munich since 2008, he was for many years Music Director of the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre, and

in 2021 appointed Chief Conductor of the Kaunas State Choir. Šervenikas is Professor of conducting at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, and an ardent promoter of new music. He is the recipient of the Lithuanian National Arts and Culture Prize (2005) and the award 'Carry Your Light and Believe' by the Lithuania Ministry of Culture in 2016.



The **London Mozart Players** was formed in 1949, performing in the opening week's events at the Royal Festival Hall in 1951 and becoming regulars there and at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Musicians associated with the orchestra include James Galway, Felicity Lott, Jane Glover, Howard Shelley, John Suchet and Simon Callow. Nicola Benedetti, Jacqueline du Pré and Jan

Pascal Tortelier played early in their careers with the orchestra. It tours and records widely, regularly performing at St Martin-in-the-Fields, St John's Smith Square, and Cadogan Hall, as well as concert venues throughout the UK. Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh, has been the orchestra's patron since 1988.



The **Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra** was founded in 1940. It has toured many European countries, Japan, South America and South Korea, and given concerts in many of the most prominent concert venues and prestigious music festivals. The orchestra has been conducted by Jonas Aleksa, Mstislav Rostropovich, Krzysztof Penderecki, Christoph Eschenbach,

and collaborated with Monserrat Caballé, Jessye Norman, Emil Gilels, Mūza Rubackytė, Mischa Maisky, and other illustrious soloists. Alongside famous classical repertoire, the orchestra is a regular participant in Lithuania's international festival of contemporary music, also regularly premièring, broadcasting, and recording works by Lithuanian composers.



Concerto for Cello and Orchestra and *Gommecourt* are première recordings
Folk Songs is a première commercial recording

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Concerto for Cello and Orchestra and *Folk Songs* recorded at St George's Church, Harrow, London, 31 May 2024

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Gommecourt recorded in the Philharmonic Hall, Vilnius, Lithuania, 6–7 January 2025

Produced, recorded and edited by **Vilius Keras**

24bit, 96kHz high resolution recording, editing and mastering

A surround sound mix with Dolby Atmos of this recording, by **David Jones** (Sonus Audio), is also available on streaming services

Booklet photos:

Page 1, album cover photo by **Peter Fribbins** (looking towards Gommecourt Wood from British lines)

Page 7, Peter Fribbins by **Maria Poli**

Page 8, Sebastian Comberti by **Giorgia Bertazzi**

Page 9, Johan Randvere by **Elle-Riin Volmer**

Page 10, Saša Mirković by **Jelena Jovanovic**

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Page 12, Robertas Šervenikas by **D. Matjvejev**

Page 13, Saša Mirković, Sebastian Comberti, Jürgen Bruns and London Mozart Players by **Peter Fribbins**

Page 14, Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra by **Aleksandra Kerienė**

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