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CLASSICS

Alice's ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

FOOL'S PARADISE

JOBY TALBOT



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Suite from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

1	Prologue	[6.48]
2	The Mad Hatter's Tea-Party	[3.08]
3	Alice Alone	[4.18]
4	The Croquet Match	[5.33]
5	Setting Up the Courtroom	[2.46]
6	The Queen of Hearts' Tango	[2.09]
7	The Cheshire Cat	[2.56]
8	The Flower Garden Part I	[7.00]
9	The Flower Garden Part II	[4.44]

Fool's Paradise

10	Part I	[4.58]
11	Part II	[10.40]
12	Part III	[6.51]
13	Part IV	[5.19]
Total timings:		[67.12]

JOBY TALBOT
ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
CHRISTOPHER AUSTIN CONDUCTOR

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An *Alice* without words

"[Alice's Adventures in Wonderland] is a book of that extremely rare kind, which will belong to all the generations to come until the language becomes obsolete." Sir Walter Besant, 1897

Joby Talbot's ballet scores for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Fool's Paradise* were both created in collaboration with celebrated choreographer Christopher Wheeldon, who first approached Talbot after hearing his piano trio *The Dying Swan*. This latter work was originally commissioned by the British Film Institute in 2002 as a new score for the 1917 silent film of the same name by Russian director Evgenii Bauer, itself illustrating the assorted trials of a delicate ballerina in monochrome peril. The score's yearning propulsion and exquisite dissonances evidently suggested to Wheeldon a greater kinetic potential, and so *The Dying Swan* for piano trio blossomed into *Fool's Paradise* for string orchestra and a new life in ballet, premiering with New York-based dance company Morphoses at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London in September 2007.

Artists of The Royal Ballet in *Fool's Paradise*



Later the following year, Wheeldon was offered the opportunity to choreograph a new full-length narrative work for The Royal Ballet. His choice of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was instant, Lewis Carroll's illogical confection having been as much a favourite of his own childhood as of so many before and since. The potential for movement offered up by the author's wild and witty imagination was irresistible, and besides, Wheeldon is an English alumnus of The Royal Ballet – what better fit than this very English story? While he was confident that ballet would lend itself admirably to the task, the matter of conjuring Wonderland's wordy world without recourse to language demanded an approach that would be at the very least playful, if not quite hare-brained. Wheeldon's next move was no more equivocal: he enlisted another Englishman – Joby Talbot.

Talbot has been quoted several times since as saying, with varying degrees of tremor, something to the effect that to have rejected such an offer would have been as nonsensical as the story he was being asked to tell. *Alice* was to be the first full-length narrative ballet score commissioned by The Royal Ballet in almost 20 years, and just as the heroine herself is equally delighted and terrified by the magical, brutal eccentricities

of the world down the rabbit-hole, so Talbot found himself at once overjoyed and overanxious at the prospect of mobilising the experiences of an impressively varied career to meet this towering brief.

Several things reassured him: previous works for dance had been well received; a revisiting of the book suggested myriad exciting ideas; and though he had not written for narrative dance, there was plenty of screen scoring experience to refer to – though this latter comfort proved fickle. The greatest encouragement, however, was Christopher Wheeldon and the memory of an enjoyable first collaboration. Which was as well when Talbot found himself all but locked into the choreographer's New York apartment for several days with fellow captive Nicholas Wright, the dramatist and, for the purposes of *Alice*, scenographer. Talbot explains: "We had the most wonderful few days flagging up possible insurmountable problems and finding ways to surmount them. It was a case of problems posing themselves, Chris thinking of a way to present them choreographically, me thinking how to present them musically, and Nick – and then Bob – thinking how to present them visually and theatrically."

"Bob" in this case is the acclaimed production designer Bob Crowley, whose own career has successfully spanned all manner of theatrical genres and who brought to *Alice* an ingenious combination of exuberance and sophistication – a description that could as comfortably apply to both Wheeldon and Talbot's contributions. A diverse creative history and the accompanying sense of possibility it engenders are common to all three, and liberated *Alice's* development from the constraints of classical expectation. And yet, one strand of Talbot's history was, in the context of this new challenge, quickly exposed as something of a false friend: "I thought that writing a narrative ballet would be more like writing film music than it turned out to be," he admitted ahead of the production's 2011 premiere. "Within an hour-long film score, only about ten minutes of music will ever really appear in the foreground to drive the narrative. The rest fits behind dialogue, provides atmospheric underscore or catches an emotional moment. In ballet, the music is absolutely in the foreground all the time: quite literally, the orchestra is between the audience and the people dancing on stage. So there's not an easy second in it. As the composer, you're never off the hook." Even with this realisation assimilated, Talbot was staring down the

prospect of writing music for a picture that could not exist without his music.



Christopher Wheeldon and Joby Talbot during the first orchestral rehearsals for the Royal Ballet's production of *Alice*.

Armed with the precious scenography and its detailed timings, Talbot sat down to begin. He was sitting for some time: “One always expects a moment where it all starts to flow. You know that the first few minutes will be like pulling teeth but then gradually it will start to come together.” Fortunately some teeth remained by the time the Muse descended into a Shoreditch studio, at which Talbot was working on another production: “I locked myself in a room with a piano for an hour and came up with Alice’s theme, the White Rabbit’s theme, the opening music and a whole lot more, all scribbled on the backs of spare bits of music that were lying around. I started putting the themes together, then created a strange, shifting, bitonal tick-tock for Wonderland.”

Once entered, Wonderland revealed itself to Talbot much in the way one would imagine – capriciously, generously yet exasperatingly: “Narrative ballet is made up of small set pieces that have to concern themselves with illogical, unmusical considerations. You have to fool people into thinking that all these miniatures are joined together, so it was like building a house with just one room, then adding another, then another...” The two guiding elements were the updated storyline,

which sees an adolescent Alice embarking on an innocent romance that occupies the narrative driver’s seat; and a notion of why it was that Wheeldon had appointed him to the role: “*Fool’s Paradise* had elements of creaky Edwardian tea dance music, but developed in a very modern way with arithmetical games. That may have been a facet of my music that appealed to Chris – given that his own work is steeped in classical ballet, but permeated by a very fresh sensibility – and when I sat down to write *Alice* I was mindful of the things that he’d liked about that previous score. So *Alice* contains melodic or harmonic gestural elements which wouldn’t seem out of place in a 19th-century ballet score, yet the whole thing is filtered through a minimal, arithmetical prism.”

The prism is strung together with themes, of which Carroll’s vivid – if not quite profound – characterisations were amply suggestive. Beyond themes and instrumental pairings for particular characters – the celesta with the White Rabbit; the oboe d’amore for the exotic Caterpillar; a (literally) highly-strung solo violin for the similarly taut Queen of Hearts – Talbot created a number of motifs for the changing moods of Alice, whose perspective on her bizarre surroundings occupies a more central

position here than in Carroll’s original. “We see people from her point of view,” Talbot explains, “which means Alice can be grumpy, happy, sad or lonely or exhausted or confused. I could have fun with that musically; if Alice were just amused on the sidelines I’d soon run out of musical ideas. All these themes come back to tell the story, and sometimes what you are hearing is only one strand in a whole group of musical games that are going on.”

All of this orchestral colour requires skilful manipulation, not only to avoid a cacophonous blur but to wrangle it into a pit of proportions less Wonderland and more opera house. “I wanted the score to have that massive variety and scale, but you are limited by what can be squeezed into the pit: at the first orchestral rehearsal I was amazed to see that everything I’d asked for was actually there. There’s an awful lot of percussion.” The orchestrations were completed by Talbot along with long-time collaborator and friend Christopher Austin, who also conducts the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in this recording.

The world premiere of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was given in a gala performance by The Royal Ballet and the Orchestra of the

Royal Opera House under Barry Wordsworth at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, on 28 February 2011; a sold-out first run followed. The North American premiere by the National Ballet of Canada and its orchestra, under David Briskin, took place on 4 June 2011 at the Four Seasons Performing Arts Centre in Toronto, to a reception so enthusiastic that it made *Alice* the company’s highest-grossing production on record. Wheeldon, Talbot and Crowley, along with these two eminent companies, had delivered what all concerned were hoping for: a ballet with as much for the balletomane as for the uninitiated, and their children.

Suite from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

1 Prologue, the garden of the deanery of Christ Church, Oxford, 1862.

A tea party is being set at a long table, while Alice Liddell and her two sisters sit at the feet of family friend Lewis Carroll, who tells them a story. Maids and footmen come and go, bringing plates of delicious food from the house. On one of these plates are piled freshly-baked jam tarts, and following close behind is their baker and the tea-party's tense hostess, Alice's mother, whose highly-strung theme we hear for the first time. This *scordatura* violin solo, tuned a semitone sharp, shall appear again in Wonderland as a character with a striking resemblance to Mother. The girls are sent inside to change, and Mrs Liddell sets about instructing the maids. When Alice emerges, Jack the gardener's boy has appeared. They dance playfully and he gives Alice a red rose recently cast aside by her mother. She purloins a jam tart for him in return, but is apprehended by Mrs Liddell, who is infuriated not only by the theft of the tart, but because she can abide only *white* roses. The church clock strikes four: tea is ready, and Jack is banished.

2 The Mad Hatter's Tea-Party.

We arrive directly from four o'clock in the deanery to the incessant chiming of tea-time in Wonderland. Here the Mad Hatter cavorts with his crazed friend the March Hare, and with the Dormouse, whose sleepy theme threatens the caffeinated Mad Hatter's fun. It is by now some time since Alice fell down the rabbit-hole, caught a glimpse of a beautiful garden of flowers and Jack's Wonderland incarnation as the fugitive Knave, and encountered the twitchy White Rabbit and the maniacal Duchess, so she hardly seems fazed by this new development. That is, until she is abandoned by the mercurial trio.



Steven McRae as the Mad Hatter.

© Johan Persson

3 Alice Alone

Alice feels – and indeed is – lost in Wonderland, unable to find the Knave, and longing for her sisters.

4 The Croquet Match

Alice has progressed to the Queen of Hearts' croquet ground, where the formidable monarch battles it out against the jealous Duchess, both wielding their flamingo mallets and hedgehog croquet balls with gleeful malice. The Queen's *scordatura* theme and the low and menacing music of the Duchess intertwine with increasing fervour, while Alice looks on in puzzlement. Before long the Knave appears and sweeps Alice into a clandestine dance, echoing their meeting as Alice Liddell and Jack in the deanery garden. When they are discovered by the Queen, the Knave is arrested and all seems lost until the Cheshire Cat materialises to distract the assembled company, while Alice slips away after him.

5 Setting Up the Courtroom

The Knave's trial is set to take place, and the Queen of Hearts' conflicted servant, the White

Rabbit, has been assigned the task of making the courtroom just so for Her Majesty, who naturally shall preside. The White Rabbit – and indeed, Lewis Carroll – have thus far been denoted by the celesta, but here we see another side of him: a more dynamic and daring character than we might have imagined, heralded by sleigh bells, percussion, brass and high woodwind that give way to a brief but bold timpani solo.

6 The Queen of Hearts' Tango

The White Rabbit's bravado vanishes when the Queen arrives and promptly throws her weight around in a bombastic tango, complete with unprovoked psychotic conniptions and narcissistic trances.



Zenaïda Yanowsky as the Queen of Hearts and artists of The Royal Ballet.

© Johan Persson

7 The Cheshire Cat

Christopher Wheeldon and Bob Crowley's vision of a giant, modular puppet comes to life as the grinning symbol of Wonderland, whose eerie, disjointed appearance is reflected in the purring flutes and French horns that support undulating lines of high woodwinds. Alice's need for direction is only compounded by the Cat, who points her this way, then that, then both, after having come apart altogether in an especially powerful sneeze.



© Johjan Persson

8 - 9 The Flower Garden

Alice at last finds her way into the place that has been eluding her all along: the beautiful flower garden, and the arms of the Knave, with whom she joyfully reprises the *pas de deux* of their first meeting in the deanery garden, a whole world away – or so it seems.

Notes © Elizabeth Seymour, 2012.

Lauren Cuthbertson as Alice and Sergei Polunin as Jack/The Knave.

JOBY TALBOT

Joby Talbot was born in Wimbledon in 1971. He studied composition privately with Brian Elias, and subsequently at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Simon Bainbridge.

Talbot's career comprehends a range of styles and purposes, including concert works as diverse as a trumpet concerto (*Desolation Wilderness*, 2006) for Alison Balsom and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra; a 60-minute a cappella choral journey along the Camino de Santiago for Nigel Short's Tenebrae (*Path of Miracles*, 2005); arrangements of songs by Detroit rock duo The White Stripes alongside existing works for acclaimed choreographer Wayne McGregor's *Chroma* (2007) at The Royal Ballet; and, also at The Royal and the National Ballet of Canada, the music for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2011), the first full-length narrative ballet score to be commissioned by The Royal Ballet in almost 20 years.

In addition, Talbot has written the madrigal *The Wishing Tree* (The King's Singers, 2002); the orchestral *Sneaker Wave* (BBC National Orchestra of Wales, 2004) and an arrangement



© Johjan Persson

of Purcell's *Chacony in G Minor* (BBC Symphony Orchestra, 2011) for the BBC Proms. *Worlds, Stars, Systems, Infinity* was commissioned in 2012 by the Philharmonia Orchestra as an addition to Holst's *The Planets*, for the second of their immersive orchestral experiences, 'Universe of Sound'.

Tide Harmonic (2009), a work for large ensemble, began life as the score for *Eau* by choreographer Carolyn Carlson and CCN Roubaix. Other significant works written or adapted for dance include *Fool's Paradise* (2007) for Christopher Wheeldon and Morphoses, an arrangement of Talbot's 2002 silent film score *The Dying Swan*; *Genus* (2007) and *Entropy* (2008) for Wayne McGregor and the Paris Opera Ballet and Random Dance respectively; and *Chamber Symphony* (2012) for the Residentie Orkest in Nederlands Dans Theater's *Chamber* by choreographer Medhi Walerski.

Talbot also has considerable experience writing for the screen, including BBC2 comedy series *The League of Gentlemen*, and feature films *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005), *Son of Rambow* (2007), *Franklyn* (2008) and *Hunky Dory* (2011), for which he developed

orchestral arrangements of pop songs with young musicians, alongside writing the largely electronic score.

Albums include *The Dying Swan* (2002, Black Box Music), *Once Around the Sun* (2005, Sony BMG), *Path of Miracles* (2005, Signum Classics), *Aluminium* (2006, XL Recordings), *Genus* (2007, Dear Oh Dear!/ant-zen) and *Tide Harmonic* (2011, Signum Classics).

CHRISTOPHER AUSTIN

Christopher Austin is one of the UK's foremost conductors of contemporary music and he has given more than 90 world and territorial first performances, demonstrating his extraordinarily wide musical sympathies. Premieres by such figures as John Adams, Luke Bedford, Peter Maxwell Davies, Tansy Davies, Michael Finnissy, Steve Reich, Poul Ruders, Bent Sørensen and Joby Talbot feature alongside collaborations with Michael Nyman, John Cale and The Divine Comedy. Recent work includes debuts with the Opéra de Rouen, Århus Sinfonietta, City of London Sinfonia and Chroma, alongside reinventions from the London Sinfonietta, BCMG and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.



© Katie Vandycck

Highlights in 2012 included the first performance of Martin Creed's *Work No. 1375*; premiere performances of Daniel Patrick Cohen's new score for Hitchcock's *The Pleasure Garden* as part of the Cultural Olympiad (and subsequently as part of the Rio Film Festival to an audience of 6000 on Copacabana Beach); and two concerts in Denmark for the 80th birthday of Per Nørgård in the presence of the composer.

Austin teaches composition, orchestration and conducting at the Royal Academy of Music. In 2009, his work there, in collaboration with the music critic Paul Morley, was the subject of a two-part BBC documentary called *How to Be a Composer*. His work as an orchestrator includes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for The Royal Ballet and *Elysian Fields* for the Rambert Dance Company.

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Central to the RPO's thriving concert schedule is its prestigious annual series at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. At the Orchestra's London home Cadogan Hall, the intimate and luxurious surroundings provide the perfect concert atmosphere in an idyllic location. Completing the Orchestra's London programme of concerts, the iconic Royal Albert Hall provides the ideal setting for a varied series of monumental performances, ranging from large-scale choral and orchestral works to themed evenings of familiar repertoire.

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<hr/> <h4><i>Fool's Paradise</i></h4> <hr/>			
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Alice's Adventures in Wonderland orchestrated by Joby Talbot and Christopher Austin.

Producer - Joby Talbot

Recorded - Mark Wyllie & Andrew Mellor

Recording Assistant - Craig Jenkins

Mixed - Mark Wyllie

Mastering - Mike Hatch, Floating Earth

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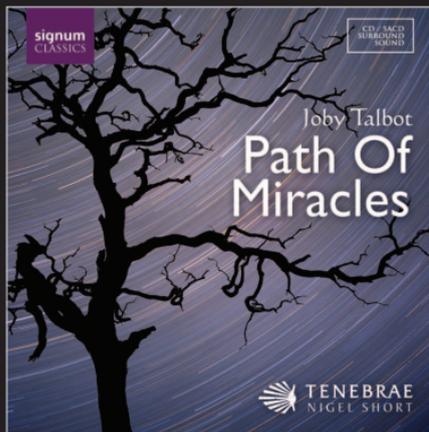
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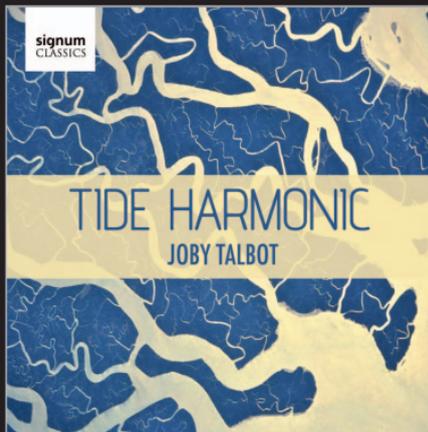


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