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CLASSICS

Richard Blackford

KALON

Czech Philharmonic | Albion Quartet | Jirí Rožeň *conductor*

KALON
RICHARD BLACKFORD (b. 1954)

1	I. Lyra	[7.42]
2	II. Beklemmt	[9.30]
3	III. Stile Concitato	[6.18]
Total timings:		[23.32]

ALBION QUARTET
CZECH PHILHARMONIC
JIRÍ ROŽEŇ CONDUCTOR

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KALON
for String Quartet and String Orchestra

- I *Lyra*
- II *Beklemmt*
- III *Stile Concitato*

Kalon is the Greek word for perfect physical and moral beauty, as conceived by the philosophers of Classical Greece. The three movements explore different aspects of *kalon*, also the context in which beauty can exist in ugliness and darkness.

The two string groups (quartet and orchestra) frequently play in different tempi simultaneously, thereby producing complex and rich sonorities and textures. Each movement approaches the combined tempi differently, and each movement explores new antiphonal possibilities, new approaches to counterpoint, new definitions of rhythmic consonance and dissonance.

I *Lyra*

In 1994 I recorded an old man playing a three-stringed Cretan lyra in Athens during the filming of Tony Harrison's Channel 4 film-poem *A Maybe Day in Kazakhstan*, for which I composed the score. In the first movement of

Kalon I transcribed the simple ostinato pattern, changed the metre slightly and incorporated a fast, dance-like drone motif with its exuberant mordant decorations.

At the beginning of *Kalon* the string quartet thus becomes a four-part "super-lyra," featuring open strings and fifths like its Cretan model. The overall structure is ternary, with two fast sections based on the lyra motif flanking a slower, more lyrical section. The entire movement is based around the lyra motif, but it undergoes melodic extensions, augmentation, intervallic and rhythmic changes in every section of the movement.

II *Beklemmt*

The title *Beklemmt* refers to the eight-bar passage in the *Cavatina* movement of Beethoven's String Quartet No. 13 Op. 130. In that section the first violin becomes disassociated from the rest of the quartet, its line is disjointed, syncopated, almost as if the "oppressed, stifled, anguished" melody of its title has become lost, almost in another world, another tempo. At eleven minutes duration, this movement is by far the longest and most dramatic of the three. I had heard

from a Holocaust survivor that Jewish string quartets in Nazi concentration camps were forced to play some of the most sublime music ever conceived (Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven), whilst a few yards away the most barbaric atrocities were being perpetrated. In this context *Kalon*, the embodiment of beauty, becomes a fragile, flickering flame surrounded by unfathomable darkness. The attempts of the quartet to survive in a hostile environment lie at the heart of the music of this movement. The string quartet is consistently at variance with the string orchestra, the tempi are never synchronised and the two ensembles consistently either interrupt or obliterate each other. The progression of the string quartet is one of ever-decreasing tempi until it reaches the first of two quotations from the Beethoven *Cavatina*. The string orchestra material, by contrast, is constructed in symmetrical sections based on tempo relationships of duple to triple time. In contrast to the first movement, the two ensembles here present sustained sections individually, rather than in combination. Unlike the first movement, the opposing tempi are deployed to create conflict and dissonance.

III *Stile Concitato*

Claudio Monteverdi coined the term *stile concitato* in the preface to his Eighth Book of Madrigals, published in 1638. He describes it as “repeated sixteenth notes in the strings, basso continuo and voice”, a practise also deployed by him in 1624 with the opera *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*. The mood of *concitato* is of agitation, even warlike sentiment, and is contrasted with what Monteverdi termed *molle*, or music that is soft, gentle and soothing. At the climax of the movement the two groups appear to be united in tempo, the repeated sixteenth notes now dominating the whole texture with syncopations of increasing complexity. In the final bars the tempi are once again split and the string orchestra punctuates the *concitato* quartet with unrelated accented chords. Both groups come together in tempo and affirmative rhythmic unison for the final two bars.

When we recorded *Kalon* with the Czech Philharmonic and Albion String Quartet in 2018, both groups were rehearsed separately, so that when they came together each group would be confident with its own material. My fears that one group would be distracted by the alien tempo of the other were quickly allayed

after Jirí Rožeň made it clear to the players in which sections they were to work as an ensemble in tempo unison and in which sections, those in multiple tempi, they must on no account listen to the other. In practise this unusual challenge for the performers gave their playing a thrilling edge that I hope is evident in the recording. I first heard *Kalon* played in its entirety at its premiere at the Cheltenham Music Festival on July 7th 2018 with string quartet and string orchestra from the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, conducted by Martyn Brabbins.

Richard Blackford 2019

The Challenges of *Kalon*

John Pickard

Kalon is one of the major outcomes of a recent period of intensive study by Richard Blackford for his doctorate at the University of Bristol that investigates aspects of polytempo and seeks to apply his findings in a range of musical contexts. What makes *Kalon* unusual is that polytempo is explored in the context of extended tonality and modality. This brings special challenges of harmonic and linear perception which, it may be argued, serially based works using

polytempo (for example, works like Stockhausen's *Gruppen* or *Carré*) do not fully address.

Aside from the sheer ingenuity and virtuosity of the technical construction, *Kalon* has considerable impact at the emotional level. This exploration of the concept of physical and moral beauty also embraces its opposite, as it must if it is to be a complete artistic statement that extends beyond the merely superficial. In its unflinching central reference to the perversion of great art in the extermination camps of the Holocaust, Blackford is also confronting his own family history, one side of his family having been almost completely wiped out during that abomination. It speaks to Blackford's great musical integrity that he chose not to speak of his personal aspect to the work at the time of the premiere, preferring instead for the music to speak on its own terms.

Kalon is a work that deserves a regular place in the repertoire, for it combines intellectual rigour and innovation with direct emotional communication. In appealing to the mind, it speaks directly to the heart.

John Pickard is Professor of Composition and Applied Musicology at the University of Bristol.

RICHARD BLACKFORD

Richard Blackford studied at the Royal College of Music London, where he was awarded the Tagore Gold Medal and the Mendelssohn Scholarship, then in Italy with Hans Werner Henze on a Leverhulme Award. He was subsequently first Composer-in-Residence at Balliol College Oxford, and later with the Brno Philharmonic. He has been Director of Music of the Royal Ballet School, and during this period he conducted his ballet *Plea To*



Autumn at the Royal Opera House. His music, which includes three operas, two ballets and many works for orchestra, chorus and chamber ensembles, has been performed and broadcast all over the world and has been recorded on Sony Classical, Warner Classics, Decca, Signum Classics and Nimbus labels. In 2000 his four-hour choral and orchestral score for the CNN/BBC series *Millennium* won an Emmy Award for Best Title Sequence and for which Richard was nominated for Outstanding Achievement in Music. His three critically

acclaimed choral works *Mirror Of Perfection*, *Voices of Exile* and *Not In Our Time* were all subjects of television documentaries and have been frequently broadcast and performed around the world. In 2014 *The Great Animal Orchestra* was premiered to great acclaim at the Cheltenham Festival and broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 before being successfully released on Nimbus Records. In July 2015 Richard was awarded *Die Goldene Deutschland* for services to music in Germany alongside Plácido Domingo and Diana Damrau. His second violin concerto *Niobe*, commissioned by the Czech Philharmonic, was premiered in the Rudolfinum, Prague in 2017 with soloist Tamsin Waley-Cohen and released on Signum Classics (SIGCD539). 2019 saw the award of his doctorate at the University of Bristol, and the premiere of his new major choral work *Pietà*, with the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus and Orchestra. Richard is a Trustee of The Bach Choir, Music For Youth and Aberystwyth MusicFest and is President of the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus, and Chairman of The English Music Festival. He is published by Novello and Nimbus Publishing.

www.blackford.co.uk

ALBION QUARTET

Tamsin Waley-Cohen violin
Emma Parker violin
Rosalind Ventris viola
Nathaniel Boyd cello

Formed in 2016, the Albion Quartet unites four outstanding young string players, brought together by a shared belief in the visceral power of the string quartet. Their current season sees the quartet returning to the Wigmore Hall and Aldeburgh Festival, as well as continuing residencies at Sainte-Mere Festival in France and RWCMD in Cardiff. They will be making a number of broadcasts for BBC Radio 3, whilst continuing their recording projects for Signum Records, for whom they are exclusive artists.

Engagements from the 2017-18 season included performances at the Louvre in Paris, Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Robert Schumann Gessellschaft in Frankfurt, Båstad Festival in Sweden, Festival of Music in Franconia and Rhine Valley Music Festival in Germany, as well as the Hay Festival in the UK. They were artists in residence at the Ryedale Festival, exploring the chamber works of

Dvořák, and are currently recording a Dvořák cycle for their label, Signum Records. They have been invited back for an extended residency to explore the complete set of Mozart Haydn quartets, with the exciting addition that each one is to be paired with a brand new commissioned work.

Their commitment to new music has included a collaboration with Kate Whitley for a powerful and evocative song cycle, the *Charlotte Mew Songs*, performed with soprano Caroline Melzer. In Summer 2019 the quartet premiered and toured a new work by Freya Waley-Cohen, co-commissioned by Aldeburgh Festival, the Phillips Collection and Sainte-Mere Festival.

They will make their US debut at the Phillips Collection in Washington, alongside appearances at several festivals including the Oxford Lieder, Stratford International, Belfast International, Cheltenham, Presteigne, and Lichfield, and participating in Beethoven cycles in the UK and Portugal.

Passionate about musical education, the quartet holds a residency at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, where they regularly give masterclasses and performances in the Dora Stoutzker Hall. As a Cavatina Chamber Music Trust ensemble, they also give frequent workshops at primary school level where they are thrilled to share the magic of chamber music with children from diverse backgrounds.

The members of the quartet play on a fine collection of instruments, including a Stradivarius and Guarnerius.



CZECH PHILHARMONIC

1st Violin	2nd Violin	Viola	Cello	Double Bass
Magdaléna Mašláňová	Václav Prudil	Jaroslav Pondělíček	Josef Špaček	Jaromír Černík
Otakar Bartoš	Ondřej Skopový	Dominik Trávníček	Jakub Dvořák	Roman Koudelka
Marie Dvorská	Zuzana Hájková	Ondřej Kameš	Jan Holeňa	Jiří Valenta
Jan Jouza	Pavel Herajm	Jaroslav Kroft	František Host	Jiří Vopálka
Viktor Mazáček	Veronika Kozlovská	Jan Mareček	Tomáš Hostička	
Pavel Nechvíle	Jan Ludvík	Jiří Poslední	Jan Keller	
Helena Skopová	Libor Vilímec	Jiří Řehák	Peter Mišejka	
Zdeněk Starý	Helena Šulcová	Jan Šimon	Karel Stralczyński	
Milan Vavřínek		Lukáš Valášek	Eduard Šístek	
Aida Shabuová				

The Czech Philharmonic gave its first concert – an all Dvořák programme which included the world première of his Biblical Songs, Nos. 1–5 conducted by the composer himself – in the famed Rudolfinum Hall on 4 January 1896. Acknowledged for its definitive interpretations of Czech composers, whose music the Czech Philharmonic has championed since its formation, the orchestra is also recognised for the special relationship it has to the music of Brahms and Tchaikovsky – friends of Dvořák – and to Mahler, who gave the world première of his Symphony No. 7 with the orchestra in 1908. The Czech Philharmonic's

extraordinary and proud history reflects both its location at the very heart of Europe and the Czech Republic's turbulent political history, for which Smetana's *Má vlast* (My Homeland) has become a potent symbol. The orchestra gave its first full rendition of *Má vlast* in a brewery in Smíchov in 1901; in 1925 under Chief Conductor Václav Talich, *Má vlast* was the orchestra's first live broadcast and, four years later, the first work that the orchestra committed to disc. During the Nazi occupation, when Goebbels demanded that the orchestra perform in Berlin and Dresden, Talich programmed *Má vlast* as an act of defiance;

while in 1945 Rafael Kubelík conducted the work as a 'concert of thanks' for the newly liberated Czechoslovakia. 45 years later, *Má vlast* was Kubelík's choice to mark Czechoslovakia's first free elections and, this year, Decca Classics released Jiří Bělohlávek's recording of *Má vlast* made at the time of the 2014 Prague Spring Festival to mark the 100th anniversary of Czechoslovak independence.

Throughout the orchestra's history, two features have remained at its core: its championing of Czech composers and its belief in music's power to change lives. Defined from its inauguration as 'an organisation for the enhancement of musical art in Prague, and a pension organisation for the members of the National Theatre Orchestra in Prague, its widows and orphans', the proceeds from the four concerts that it performed each year helped to support members of the orchestra who could no longer play and the immediate family of deceased musicians.

As early as the 1920s, Václav Talich (Chief Conductor 1919–1941) pioneered concerts for workers, young people and other voluntary organisations including the Red Cross, the Czechoslovak Sokol and the Union of Slavic

Women and, in 1923 gave three benefit concerts for Russian, Austrian and German players including members of the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras. The philosophy continues today, and is equally vibrant. In addition to a recently launched Orchestral Academy, a comprehensive education strategy engages with more than 400 schools bringing all ages to the Rudolfinum – some travelling as many as four hours – to hear concerts and participate in masterclasses.

An early champion of Martinů's music, the orchestra premièred his Czech Rhapsody in 1919 and, its detailed inventory of Czech music, undertaken by Václav Talich included the world premières of Martinů's *Half Time* (1924), Janáček's *Sinfonietta* (1926) and the Prague première of Janáček's *Taras Bulba* (1924). Rafael Kubelík was also an advocate of Martinů's music and premièred Field Mass (1946) and Symphony No. 5 (1947), while Karel Ančerl conducted the première of Martinů's Symphony No. 6 *Fantaisies symphoniques* (1956). *Fantaisies symphoniques* has also featured twice in the orchestra's programmes at the BBC Proms, first in 1969 under Chief Conductor Václav Neumann and then in 2010 under Sir John Eliot Gardiner.

JIŘÍ ROŽEŇ

Jiří Rožeň is one of the most exciting and promising conductors of his generation. He has seen success in Salzburg and London as the Finalist of both the Nestlé and Salzburg Festival Young Conductors Award and the Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition. Formerly, as Assistant Conductor at the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Jiří worked alongside Donald Runnicles and Thomas Dausgaard and

also assisted them at the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh International Festival.

In 2018/19 season, Jiří continues to build on his growing international profile debuting with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, BBC Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra and returns to Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra. Other engagements include his debut with Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra as well as appearances with the



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Orchestre de Pau Pays de Béarn, Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra and Brno Philharmonic.

Highlights from the 2017/18 season included his subscription debut and two more projects with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as engagements with the Bruckner Orchester Linz, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra (among others at Prague Spring Festival), Wiener Concert-Verein and the Croatian Radiotelevision (HRT) Symphony Orchestra in Zagreb in a summer open-air gala.

A passionate advocate of Czech music, in recent seasons Jiří has conducted his signature work Symphony No.4 by Miloslav Kabeláč at Salzburg Festival with Camerata Salzburg (Austrian premiere) and at the Prague Spring Festival with PKF-Prague Philharmonia. Also, he premiered the new critical edition of Bohuslav Martinů's Spectre's Bride with the Brno Philharmonic and Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno.

Born in Prague in 1991, Jiří Rožeň studied conducting at conservatoires and universities of Prague, Salzburg, Hamburg, Zürich and Glasgow, where he was Leverhulme Conducting Fellow. His mentors have included Garry Walker, Dennis Russell Davies, Ulrich Windfuhr

and Johannes Schlaefli. Other important influences include Daniele Gatti, Bernard Haitink, David Zinman and Peter Eötvös in masterclasses with orchestras such as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich.



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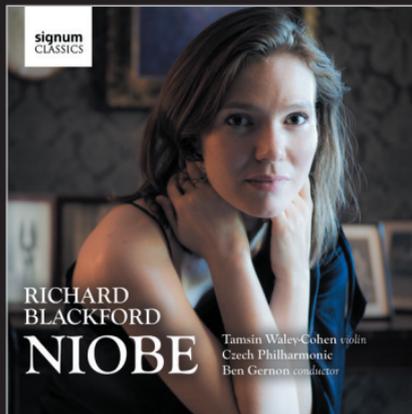
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