

**World premiere of Edward Gregson's  
A Vision in a Dream: concerto for  
oboe and orchestra.  
Leeds Town Hall.**

Buttressed by two cornerstones of the Romantic repertoire, Tchaikovsky's

Fantasy Overture *Romeo and Juliet* and Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, the focal point of the BBC Philharmonic's concert conducted by Ben Gernon at Leeds Town Hall on February 8 was the first performance of Edward Gregson's oboe concerto, *A Vision in a Dream* (2019), featuring soloist Jennifer Galloway. The concerto is based on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan*, the subtitle of which gives Gregson's new work its name.

Although not strictly programmatic, the piece followed the contours of its source material, with the soloist acting as the story's narrator and chief protagonist.

Modest orchestral forces consisted of double woodwind, two horns, two trumpets, harp, solo percussion and strings. Occupying a prominent position stage left, the solo percussion, in the experienced hands of Paul Patrick, had a key role in the unfolding drama, as did the cor anglais, sensitively played by Gillian Callow.

In the intimately expressive, freely notated Prologue, the soloist began off-stage, gradually moving towards the customary solo position to the left of the conductor. A major element in the eloquent oboe writing from the outset was a judicious use of multiphonics,

handled by Galloway with considerable interpretative finesse. Fiery, improvisational exchanges between oboe soloist, cor anglais and percussionist in the concerto's early stages were richly rewarding, with the volatile aspect of *Kubla Khan*'s character represented by percussion and the two woodwinds adopting a placatory role. Unleashing the full orchestral forces in earnest, the brisk 'Duologue' section began in uneasy mood and presented two contrasting ideas, the first fractured and rhythmic and the second songlike and fluent. A tender, lyrical 'Pastorale' at the heart of the score featured the most overtly melodic music of the whole piece and concluded with a quasi-folksong. After echoes of the opening material, the 'Round Dances' offered



*Jennifer Galloway*

a trio of memorable, rhythmical ideas, the first brooding, the second joyful and the third sharply-defined. In the Epilogue, the three leading characters revisited the Prologue's powerful discourse. The musical argument was resolved and the soloist gradually left the stage until her last repeated phrases faded into silence.

With some thirteen concertos in his catalogue, Edward Gregson has made the medium central to his output. In his latest example he has exploited the genre's dynamic and interactive properties to significant effect. The versatile, idiomatic solo part highlights both the dramatic and the lyrical qualities of the instrument and the vibrant and varied orchestration is also an intrinsic part of the work's success. Both these prime ingredients are heard in the context of an organic,

single-movement structure of impressive integrity and logic. Indeed, so vivid are the concerto's flights of fancy and so cogent its structure that the piece can be enjoyed without any knowledge of its literary inspiration.

Jennifer Galloway negotiated with elegance and imagination the technical challenges of a solo part created especially for her. She also interrelated meaningfully and responsively with the other character portrayals and members of the orchestra. Ben Gernon harnessed the concerto's disparate elements convincingly, allowing the spontaneous-sounding episodes free rein while keeping a firm grip on the more highly-charged and sumptuously scored paragraphs.

**Paul Conway**