

## 64<sup>th</sup> International Rostrum of Composers

### BBC Radio 3 Submission 3/3

#### Alissa Firsova

#### **Alissa Firsova: Bergen's Bonfire - brief description**

With the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Andrew Litton. Alissa Firsova writes: 'Originally inspired by an apocalyptic dream I had a few years ago, Bergen's Bonfire is a depiction of Ragnarök (The Twilight of the Gods), only set in the landscape of Bergen – as if one were seeing it all happen from the top of Mount Fløyen, which overlooks the city. In my dream I could see the moon and the sun in one landscape, the stars and sky full of beautiful colours – extraordinary peace and tranquillity – before the sun exploded and the earth was in flames. The sun, moon and stars are also described in the Ragnarök as not knowing what their fate is until a series of wars breaks out between the Gods and the Wanes, and the world is destroyed by a great fire.

'What attracted me most to this version of the end of the world, though, is that a new world then begins, full of purity and joy. This tone-poem is in three sections. The first describes the Twilight of the Gods and introduces the themes associated with the sun (first heard in the violins), moon (first heard in the trumpet) and stars (high-pitched, trill-filled passages in the winds). The slow second section is dedicated to my inspiring walk around the beautiful Mount Fløyen (beginning with strings accompanying a clarinet solo, followed by bassoon, oboe and flute solos) and likewise paints the calm before the storm in my dream. The third is something completely contrasting – a new world – where two Gods return to create a much more positive, simplistic and innocent universe.'

#### **Bergen's Bonfire Op. 31 - An Apocalyptic Dream - in-depth programme note**

Based on Ragnarök from the Norse mythological Poetic Edda, Völuspá  
Dedicated to the 250th Anniversary of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra

Originally inspired by an apocalyptic dream I had a few years ago, Bergen's Bonfire is a depiction of Ragnarök (The Twilight of the Gods), only set in the landscape of Bergen - as if one is seeing it all happen from the top of Mount Floyen. In my dream I could see the moon and the sun in one landscape, the stars and sky full of beautiful colours - extraordinary peace and tranquility - before the sun exploded and the Earth was in flames. The sun, moon and stars are also described in the Ragnarök as not knowing what their fate is, until a series of wars break out between the Gods and the Wanes and the world is destroyed by a great fire. What attracted me most to this version of the end of the world though - is that a New World then begins - full of purity and joy!

This tone-poem is in three sections: the first describes the Twilight of the Gods and introduces the Sun (first heard in the violins), Moon (first heard in the trumpet) and Stars (high-pitched, trill-filled passages in the winds) themes. The slow, second section is dedicated to my very inspiring walk around the beautiful Mount Floyen (beginning with strings accompanying a clarinet solo, followed by bassoon, oboe and flute solos) and likewise paints the calm before the storm in my dream. While the third is something completely

contrasting - a New World - where 2 Gods return to create a much more positive, simplistic and innocent universe, which is based on a piece I wrote when I was 8 years old (introduced by the celeste and glockenspiel). At the end, the evil serpent makes one last attempt to rise and threaten this new joyous existence (the return of the opening statement), but it quickly sinks and the New World triumphs (with the return of the Sun and Moon themes in the brass). This reminds me of my favourite opera, The Magic Flute, where at the end, the Queen of the Night makes a final attempt to attack, however the rays of the Sun drive out the Night - and so, Good always wins over Evil!

The following description is spread throughout the score:

**The Twilight of the Gods** - The Sun Theme - The Moon Theme - The Stars Motif - 1st War between the Gods and Wanes - The Heimdall Horn summons to the Last Battle - The Last Battle - The Sun turns black, Earth sinks in the Sea - The hot Stars down from Heaven are whirled - Fierce grows the steam and the life-feeding flame - Till fire leaps above Heaven itself

**A walk on Mount Floyen** - In wondrous beauty once again shall the golden tables stand mid the grass, which the Gods had owned in the days of old

**New Age of Peace and Happiness** - More fair than the Sun, a hall I see, roofed with gold, on Gimle it stands; There shall the righteous rulers dwell, and happiness ever shall they have - Baldr, God of light, joy, purity, beauty, innocence and reconciliation - Hoth, God of night and darkness - Gimle, home of the happy - The serpent's final attempt to return before it sinks - The New World triumphs!

*Alissa Firsova*

**Alissa Firsova**, born on 24th July 1986 to composer parents, is a British-Russian composer, pianist and conductor. Since winning the BBC Proms/Guardian Young Composer competition in 2001, she has received two world premieres at the Proms, both conducted by Andrew Litton: her *Bach Allegro* was performed by the RPO in 2010 and her *Bergen's Bonfire Op. 31* featured in the Bergen Philharmonic's 250th Anniversary Prom in 2015. Her music has also been performed by Imogen Cooper, Henning Kraggerud, Dante Quartet, Netherlands Blazer Ensemble, Seattle Chamber Players and the Britten Sinfonia, among others. Alissa was recently invited to Verbier, Asiago and Conques Festivals as pianist/composer-in-residence. Her music is available on disc by The Sixteen on the Coro label and Henning Kraggerud on the Simax label.

As a pianist she gave her Wigmore Hall and Proms debuts in 2009, has performed for numerous prominent venues and festivals since, and released her debut CD, *Russian Émigrés*, in 2015. She has enjoyed collaborations with distinguished artists such as Stephen Kovacevich, Stephen Isserlis, Roman Simovic, Tim Hugh, Andrew Marriner and the Dante Quartet. After completing a postgraduate conducting course at Royal Academy of Music under Colin Metters, Alissa enjoyed a 'triple'-debut with the English Chamber Orchestra as director, composer and conductor at the Cadogan Hall in 2013. She has twice conducted the Camerata RCO (Members of the Royal Concertgebouw) in the world premiere of her *Le Soleil de Conques* op. 33 in Conques, midi-Pyrenees in 2015 and more recently for the Union Musicale series in Turin in Dec 2016.

Alissa's other recent premieres have included her Alma Mahler inspired piano duet, *Bride of the Wind Op. 34* performed by the Francoise-Green Duo in their St. John's Smith Square Viennese-residency in April 2016 and her triple concerto, *Asiago Concerto Op. 35* for the 50th Asiago Festival, which she performed together with the Beethoven triple concerto with Marc-Daniel van Biemen and Julius Berger in August 2016. In Nov 2016, Alissa joined the Tippett Quartet in Dvorak's Piano Quintet for a series of concerts in London and Oxford, which also included the world premiere of her Tennyson and Blackdown inspired *Tennyson Fantasy* Op. 36 for string quartet, and they also bring this programme to the Haslemere Festival on 17th May 2017. Alissa was invited to curate and co-present the BBC Radio 3 Breakfast Show on 8th March, celebrating International Women's Day.

She is very excited about her upcoming debut Composer Portrait CD for the Vivat label and future commissions include an orchestral piece for British conductor, Alexander Soddy, who will be premiering it with his Mannheim National Theatre Orchestra on 5th and 6th March 2018, as well as a work for viola and piano for Krzysztof Chorzelski. On 6th May, she performed Brahms 1st Piano Concerto with St. Albans Symphony/Tom Hammond and she is also looking forward to upcoming concerts with Daniel Rowland, Tim Hugh and Andrew Marriner in May and June. Her *Souvenir Melancolique* Op. 23, for clarinet and horn, is receiving its UK premiere at the Royal Northern Sinfonia Summer Concert Series in July.

