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Saturday, 9th August 2008

# Music review: Apparitions

**Published Date:** 07 July 2008

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**APPARITIONS**

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**DUART CASTLE**

FRIDAY'S world premiere of Apparitions, performed as part of the Mendelssohn on Mull festival in Duart Castle, was musically and visually a fascinating event that will long abide in the memory.

Created by Anglo-American composer Stephen Montague,

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the multi-media experience reflected the castle's long and bloody history with strange sights and sounds that were on occasion disturbing and certainly always thought-provoking.

One of the eeriest sounds came from the carnyx, a vertically-held Celtic trumpet with a mouth shaped like a boar's head. The rest of the music was more conventional, coming from string instruments played by the young professionals who, with their mentors, have been at the festival for intensive rehearsals and performances of chamber music.

Montague had placed them in several groups in different parts of the castle so that as the audience – themselves masked – moved around the castle they heard distinctly different musical elements (a snatch of Bartok here, a touch of Schoenberg there, but mostly Montague's compositions).

The audience was guided by silent, black costumed beings with strange animalistic headdresses. Were indeed they human at all? These headdresses, designed by Alexandra Julyan, were fantastic, one featuring a foot-long wavy barbed tongue, another a grotesque feathered bird's head.

Following an introductory piano piece played by Montague himself, resplendent in funereal top hat and tails, the audience was left to wander the castle at will.

Each group of musicians played a different repertoire. The largest group – a septet led by Gabrielle Lester – stayed in the Great Hall for Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* and a Montague piece, *The Hammer Hawk* which also featured some virtuoso piano playing by Richard Jeffcoat.

What was disturbing, though, was hearing two or even three different sets of sounds at the same time. For example, the group led by Marcia Crayford played Shostakovich's *String Quartet 15*, which was overlaid faintly with Paganini's *Caprices* being played next door by Michael Gurevich, whilst from the floor above emanated the faint sound of Bach's *Air on a G String* sung by the gifted amateur choral group, *Ensemble 1685*. It was all quite mad; like a wonderfully dysfunctional family of ghosts had taken over the castle. Which, in a way, they had!

Musically, perhaps the most interesting moments were *Snowscapes* (Montague's finale orchestral piece); a riveting and haunting arrangement of Tam Linn (also by Montague) and the *carnyx* finale in the courtyard. Tam Linn was played with precision and sheer verve by the festival's artistic director, Levon Chilingirian, and young professionals Zoë Beyers, Veronika Toth and Rowena Calvert. And John Kenny's command of the *carnyx* was total, conjuring up a range of sounds from the spookily mournful, through percussive high-pitched squeaks to a creepy rattle.

*Apparitions* was the finale to the week-long festival. The 20-year-old event brings talented young musicians to Mull to not just study with the world-class mentors but also play with them – an altogether scarier prospect than the conventional coaching they receive at college. But probably not as scary as playing Montague's score in the semi-darkness!

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- **Last Updated:** 06 July 2008 7:02 PM
- **Source:** The Scotsman
- **Location:** Edinburgh

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