



Hornroh Modern Alphorn Quartet • Prom 21

alphorns

Swiss alphorn player Balthasar Streiff is keen to dispel any misconceptions about his instrument. 'The way we think of it today, as a folk instrument, only comes from the second half of the 20th century. It was invented early in the 19th century in the countryside around Berne. Before then there were lots of smaller, similar instruments such as natural horns, which were kind of early mobile phones: used for communication between people, calling cattle, or even to earn a few coins for shepherds in the winter.' Streiff is one quarter of the Hornroh Modern Alphorn Quartet, whose focus is on the sonic possibilities of their remarkable instruments. 'We started in 2000 and we've always been very interested in contemporary music and ways of thinking about the instruments' tuning.'

Accordingly, the work that brings this alphorn quartet to the Proms – *Concerto grosso* No. 1 by Georg Friedrich Haas – has nothing to do with yodelling mountain-dwellers but rather combines the alphorns with an orchestra. 'All the musicians have to really listen hard – we all play in different tunings, sometimes in quarter-tones, and the orchestra also has to play the alphorns' pitches. The most important aspect of the alphorn is its pure tuning – its sound is awesome and it's the perfect instrument for contemporary music.'

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