



## HEBRIDES ENSEMBLE AND THOMAS BLOCH

Specialist in rare instruments performs with the glass harmonica

'It looks like a horizontal kebab. But instead of meat, you have crystal glass bowls.' It's an odd description for a musical instrument, and what Thomas Bloch is describing is admittedly one of the world's strangest: the glass harmonica.

If a harmonica makes you think of the blow-and-suck mouth organ of sultry blues numbers, turn your thoughts instead to rubbing your fingers around wine glasses to make them sing. 'Then imagine you have 37 different glasses, not just one or two,' continues Bloch, a virtuoso player of the instrument. These glasses, or more correctly bowls, are mounted one inside another on a rotating spindle, and Bloch simply has to touch them for the note to sound. 'The bowls turn constantly – I have a little electric motor for them, and a pedal I use to increase and decrease the speed, and hence the volume. It's a bit like a crystal keyboard.'

And that poetic description matches the instrument's magical, otherworldly sound – one that has attracted film composers and pop musicians alike. 'I've played the glass harmonica on several movie soundtracks – *Amadeus*, *March of the Penguins*, even *Prisoners*, a new film with Hugh Jackman,' says Bloch. 'And I've also played it with pop musicians like Gorillaz, Radiohead, Daft Punk and others.'

What brings him to the Edinburgh International Festival, though, is Mozart, who was an early fan of the instrument (it was invented way back in 1761) and who composed solo pieces for it as well as using its ghostly tones alongside a string ensemble, which Bloch performs with the Edinburgh-based Hebrides Ensemble. It's a neat way of reminding us that the EIF's technological theme doesn't just take in the complex electronics of today's music, but also the quainter and more charming cutting-edge breakthroughs of the past. (David Kettle)

■ *Hebrides Ensemble and Thomas Bloch, The Queen's Hall, 26 Aug, 11am, £8-£29.*