Instruments of the night

A concerto nocturne with a twist

COMPOSER **John Woolrich**
WORK ***To the Silver Bow***
PERFORMERS **Leon Bosch (double bass) Robert Smissen (viola) Academy of St Martin in the Fields/Simon Blendis (violin)**
DATE **16 February**
PLACE **St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, UK** bit.ly/22KrZ7l

John Woolrich

Leon Bosch

'Violin and cello belong to the day, viola and double bass to the night,' says British composer John Woolrich of the inspiration behind *To the Silver Bow*, his new concerto for viola and bass. The work explores what he describes as the 'dark, shadowy character' of the two instruments. The title is taken from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the 'silver bow' describing the moon.

The piece consists of one continuous 15-minute movement and begins in a tempo of ♪ = 120 in 3/8 time. The chromatic movements of the solo instruments are accompanied by irregular rhythmic motifs in the string orchestra. The tripleted semiquavers of the first violin part lay the foundation for the piece, while the lower strings interject with off-beat demisemiquavers. As the concerto unfolds and the soloists explore the extremes of their registers, Woolrich varies rhythms through alternating bars of 2/8, 4/8 and 3/8.

The movement is divided into sections clearly marked by changes in instrumentation and time signature. 'It's a bit like jump-cutting in film: you can hop from a lyrical moment to a capricious one without any transitions,' says Woolrich. 'There are dozens of these tiny shards in this piece.'

'Every ounce of the piece is John Woolrich,' adds Bosch. But these musical peculiarities pose their own trials for the soloists. 'He uses 21st-century language so it's essentially tonal, but with a twist,' the bassist explains. 'John's voice is certainly a unique and developed one, and in *To the Silver Bow* he uses mesmeric rhythmic units that form the basis of the entire piece. For me the challenge is finding the essence of the composition, as opposed to just faithfully realising "the dots on the page". Like all things, the more time you spend with something, the deeper your understanding of it becomes.'

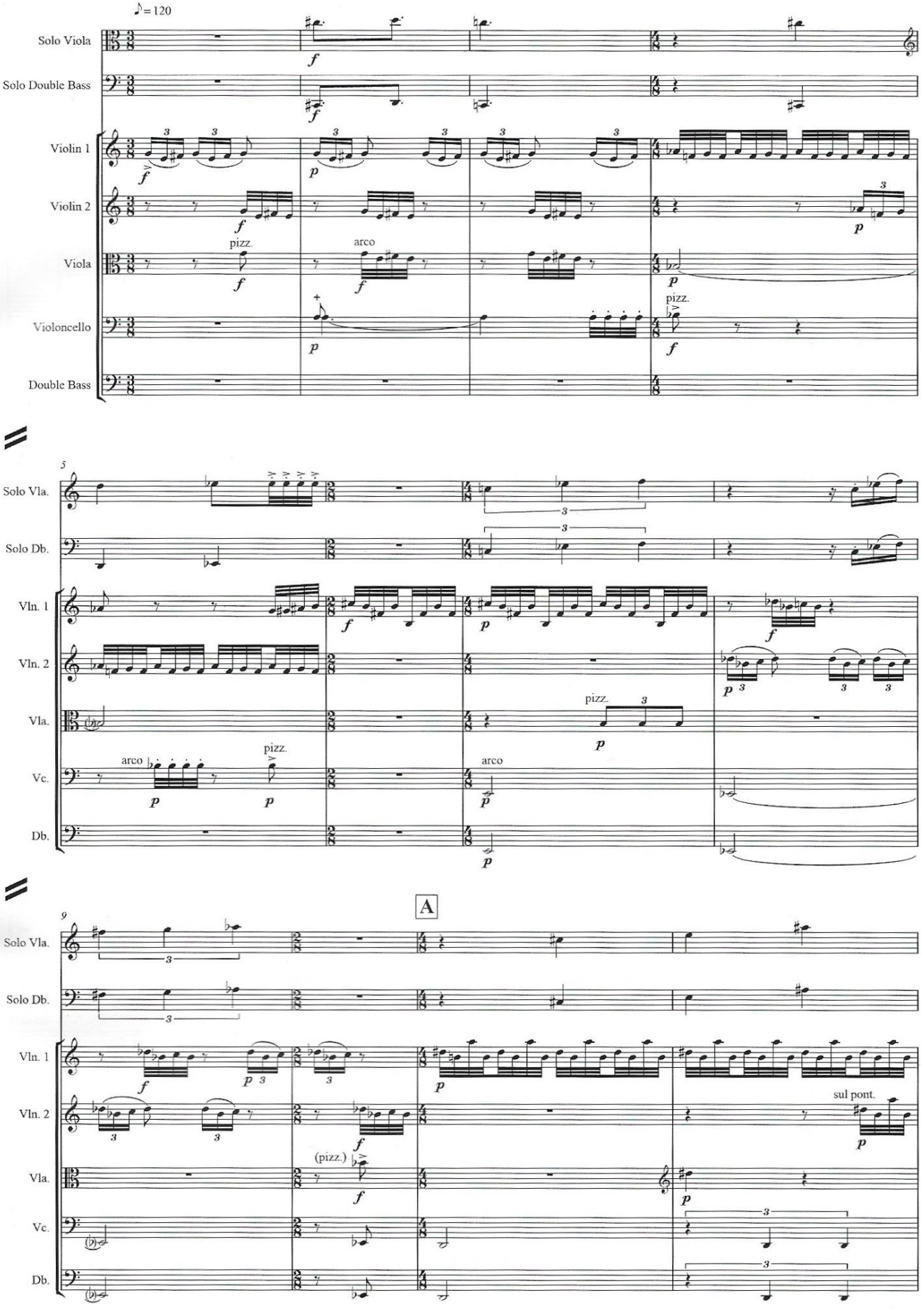
HARNONCOURT PHOTO WERNER KMETITSCH. BOSCH PHOTO GUY MAYER. WOOLRICH PHOTO J.W. FOXALL

for Leon Bosch

To the Silver Bow

a double concerto for viola, double bass and strings

JOHN WOOLRICH



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