

impressed, even on multiple hearings. Very self-conscious music, aware of its market and the value of sounding like wannabe pop flavoured Benjamin Britten. *A Dog's Heart* by Alexander Raskatov might be interesting. Simon McBurney ( Russian specialist and brother of Gerard) directs. This is receiving its world premiere at the Holland Festival this year, where Martyn Brabbins will be conducting. The Holland Festival describes it thus "...part of the Russian absurdist tradition.....Raskatov presents an imaginatively emotional take on the absurd story of a surgeon who implants a human pituitary gland into the brain of a stray dog. the dog becomes a rude and immoral apparatchik for the soviet Department for Eliminating Vagrant Quadropeds". Rude is better than pretentious, at least it can be funny.

Next Easter, *Parsifal* - but no details as yet.

photo : **Xavier de Jauréguiberry**

**Benjamin Britten ; Charles Gounod ; George Frideric Handel ; Nico Muhly ; Alexander Raskatov ; Toby Spence ; Martyn Brabbins ; Paul Daniel ; Edward Gardner ;**

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## London Sinfonietta Pedro Amaral O sonho

### CLASSICAL ICONOCLAST



Biggest secret in town! The London Sinfonietta premieres Pedro do Amaral's chamber opera *O Sonho* (the dream) on 25th April, not in the usual Sinfonietta venues but at the Robin Howard Dance Theatre in Bloomsbury. ([book here](#) it's hard to find otherwise, although you might have to phone the box office -- the theatre's online booking is flakey) It's a Sunday, so no congestion charge and relatively easy parking. Multiple good reasons for going. Pedro Amaral's a seriously interesting composer, very much his own man. What's more, the opera's based on Fernando Pessoa's unfinished drama on the theme of Salome.

Fernando Pessoa didn't exist! Or rather he mega existed. in the form of at least four separate identities, each with his own elaborate persona, who corresponded intensely with each other in literary journals. Rather like the trolls that inhabit internet discussion groups, but Pessoa's personas didn't chatter for the sake of chatter. They were erudite and actually had something worth saying!

Pessoa inhabited multiple worlds in real life, too. Born in 1888 in Lisbon, he grew up in South Africa. The experience of living as a European (but not only one type of European) in Africa moulded his ability to skip between different and parallel worlds. When he settled back in Lisbon, he was the epitome of turn of the century European spiv, spending most of his time in coffee shops talking literature. On the surface he was a punctilious bourgeois. Inside a wild, intensely oddball plethora of ideas. His life "was" artistic creation. Imagine Varèse, Salvador Dali, Richard Benjamin, Magritte and Shakespeare all mixed as one. He lived the highly perfumed Portuguese hybrid of baroque and Romanticism, electrified by ultra modern surrealism. No wonder he needed multiple personalities. He continues to inspire multiple interpretations today. The [photo](#) here is just civic sculpture, but the photo makes it look like Pessoa's head is flying, disembodied.



What will Pedro Amaral's *O Sonho* sound like? He's a quiet, self effacing person (extremely good looking) but a musician, not a talker. (Get to the show by 6.15 when he's being interviewed). The first time I heard his music, it was being conducted by Peter Eötvös, (one of Amaral's teachers). It didn't make much sense. The next time I heard the same piece, Amaral himself conducted. It sounded completely different, vibrant and vivid, "Crenellations" he had described its quirky up and down rhythms. To me it felt like a dragon uncurling itself, ready to take off into flight. Here is a sample of Amaral's *O Sonho* :