# Reflections on the BBC SINGERS recent trip to Glasgow, the experience of James Dillon's music, and the perils of Smartphones.

This wasn't a typical trip away. It has been the case in previous experience that the rigours of a tour - or at least a spell away from the picturesque bunker of Maida Vale Studios can leave one more exhausted than when one left. Despite the temporary release that going away brings from looking after young children at home, dealing with leaking roofs or enduring long commutes; the varied and often uncanny rehearsal schedules can play havoc with the body clock – not to mention the obligatory socialising - that is as much a staple diet of tours as the local *staple diet*, which in this case meant 'Scottish cuisine'.

I ate Italian. But I couldn't pass the opportunity of sinking deep into the peat bogs of my favourite Islay Whiskeys – the Bowmore, the Laphroaig, and time enough to sample the fine Deuchars at one point. Indeed, some burnt toast from backstage set off the fire alarm during the dress rehearsal forcing us to muster on the cold street corner, and hence to the local pub. Probably the most "professional" pint of my career since no sooner had I got it in my hand then a message came through to say we were going back in!

Dietary critiquing aside, it was for the music that we were there. After much soul searching I can honestly describe Dillon's music as noisily original. The work itself lasted over 5 hours with 2 intervals - precious few rest bites in texture or intensity for the listener. For the audience, it was a season ticket for grand Germanesque style opera, a pilgrimage of endurance over enjoyment. The hall was not packed to the rafters, and a colleague of mine remarked afterwards he was amazed there wasn't a higher rate of attrition. For all Dillon's impenetrable technicality, it has to be said that the vocal writing was refreshingly sensitive for ultra modern music. No requirement to shout or whisper loudly and unnecessarily, no endless phrases needing impossible breath-control. Indeed, he was generous enough to allow us to cut the bars in the vocal part marked "Lion's Roar!"

Thankfully, the shear length of the piece meant that we had long periods offstage to relax and catch up on the latest rugby scores. In the end however, there was no escaping the reality of a 5 hour concert; long periods of time onstage and, seated as I was behind a row a Woodwind, Brass and steel (music stands), with the prospect of 50+ minutes still to go

before our contribution, I decided to mull over the wall of music from the repose of a power-nap. As it happens, I needn't have worried about not being seen, since my colleagues, also eager for something to do, decided to photograph me in 'contemplation' and place the picture on Facebook!

So, I humbly refer you to my original comment - this wasn't a typical trip away. Dillon describes his music as "…a mythos of imagined waters, of fairies and snake-gods…" The critics described it as "weightless hyperactivity". I describe it as long enough to allow me to be the only person to end the evening more refreshed than when it started! Our thanks goes to the BBCSSO for their excellent facilities and welcome, and to Glasgow for its utterly unique vibe, because nothing says you're in Scotland more than passing 3 men on the street in skirts dancing the Hokey Cokey to bagpipes!