

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 11 May 2024
7.30pm

Modern Medieval 3

JACK Quartet

Christopher Otto violin
Austin Wulliman violin
John Pickford Richards viola
Jay Campbell cello

Austin Wulliman (b.1982)

Dave's Hocket (2024) *UK première*

Gabriella Smith (b.1991)

Carrot Revolution (2015)

Morton Feldman (1926-1987)

Structures (1951)

Cenk Ergün (b.1978)

Sonare (2014-5)

Interval

Liza Lim (b.1966)

String Creatures (2022) *UK première*

*I. Cat's Cradle (3 diagrams of grief) • II. Untethered •
III. A nest is woven from the inside out*

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The last concert of today's modern medieval odyssey opens up a still wider field of music in which to go medieval is to go forward. There is again a piece by a member of the JACK Quartet, **Austin Wulliman** this time, whose note quotes a passage from Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* about the sun's rays transmitting, through the coloured geometry of stained glass, stories echoing down generations:

'The form and feeling of Machaut's *Hoquetus David*', Wulliman goes on to say, 'is suggestive of some of these beautifully rich artistic methods. Each rhythmic cell tiles with others to form a beautifully crystalline structure over a familiar melodic phrase. In *Dave's Hocket*, I use Machaut's own source material (the melisma on 'David' from an *Alleluia*), number games, rhythmic motif and harmonic language as a jumping-off point. I also tie his world together with the sounds of my own time by mashing it up with Arvo Pärt's *Fratres*, a ubiquitous presence in my younger years.

'The rich conflict of these two harmonic languages, combined with my own interests in continuously unfolding polyrhythmic formal construction and microtonal harmony led me to create this dance at the door to the cathedral. It is morning, and light passes through the stained glass onto my face as I look up at the great sculptures that stand sentry by the entrance. I imagine myself as the young monk Adso in the Eco novel, observing the sculptural forms ecstatically twisting toward the one seated in judgment: "...as David must have danced before the Ark!"'

Gabriella Smith's *Carrot Revolution* more runs than dances through its ten minutes – runs seemingly breathless as it begins, with noises only a trained string player could muster. As it goes on, new phases either effortlessly ease themselves out of the old or start as suddenly as the last ended. We meet stretches of folk fiddling, with minimal tunes brought up fresh by attention to detail and sometimes gritty sound. The Who's 'Baba O'Riley' is on the playlist, as is Pérotin crossed with Georgian voices. And it all makes one great wheel. The title comes from a saying misattributed to Cézanne but none the worse for that: 'The day will come when a single, freshly observed carrot will start a revolution'. To which Smith adds: 'I envisioned the piece as a celebration of that spirit of fresh observation and of new ways of looking at old things.'

Morton Feldman on his six-minute *Structures* of 1951: 'At this first meeting with John [Cage] I brought him a string quartet. He looked at it for a long time and then said: "How did you make this?" In a very weak voice I answered John: "I don't know how I made it."'

Cenk Ergün has remarked of his *Sonare* that it 'unfolds through repetitions of fast, loud, dissonant patterns, at times evoking the sound world of a swarm of wasps'. To make such material sound tightly defined and to maintain it for twelve minutes converts the obnoxious into the enthralling. The busy, buzzing tones circle and regroup; patterns emerge from the ensemble and go again, or are transformed into something else; one might even speak of the wasps as singing. '*Sonare* was composed', the composer continues, 'through rigorous, close collaboration with JACK. At first, the quartet interpreted and recorded notation containing the initial sketches of a few repeated patterns. Using audio software, I spliced these recordings into tiny fragments, and treated them as source material to create a countless variety of new patterns. I then transcribed these into notation for JACK to play and record once more. The final score is the result of many repetitions of this process of back-and-forth between audio and notation.'

Liza Lim chose the title for her work of 2022 to indicate that both the score and the performing ensemble are 'hybrid organisms, multiplicities of bodies and minds and desires. ... There's something magical about string', she expands. 'Rather than an inert substance, strings have an animacy that offers a generative language for thinking about relations in the world: binding and unbinding, entanglement, knots, frictions, tensions. Lines, threads and fibres can take textilic form as net, mesh, weave, nest. Strings also exist where there is organic growth: think of the linear intelligence of vines, roots, shoots, tendrils and mycelia threading their way through the world. A string retains every twist and turn that it encounters and so is an ideal form for thinking about memory, story-telling, magic – forms of time and of seduction. As soon as you pick up a piece of string, you want to fiddle with it, turn it into a cat's cradle and join your story with someone else's.

'The work begins with three short "diagrams of grief": gestures like fingernails ripping into skin, repeated cries of lamentation, and laboured breathing are patterned into music. The second part plays with these elements, expanding and contracting them in time, questioning the fixity of things whilst weaving a shifting fabric of glittering sound. The final part looks for kinship between the way a bird creates a home by moulding fibres around its body and a music that organically emerges out of rubbing, brushing and sweeping actions made by musicians on and with their instruments'.

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