

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 11 September 2021 1.00pm

9/11: 20 Years On

Adam Swayne piano

Karen Walwyn

Reflections on 9/11

III. Anguish • VI. Burial

Henry Cowell (1897-1965)

The Tides of Manaunaun (?1917)

Aeolian Harp (c.1923)

Kevin Malone (b.1958)

Sudden Memorials (2021) *world première*

Scott Joplin (1867-1868)

Solace - A Mexican Serenade (1909)

David Del Tredici (b.1937)

Gotham Glory (2004)

III. Missing Towers (Perpetual Canon)

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It may be impossible to find ultimate meaning in the apocalyptic scenes witnessed twenty years ago at New York's Twin Towers and elsewhere in the United States. Yet the victims of 9/11 – those murdered on the day itself and those still dying because of the West's military response to it – must be remembered not as statistics but as individuals in possession of common human aspirations, fears, hopes, dreams. Music became part of the grieving process almost from the moment the dust settled on Lower Manhattan. Adam Swayne's recital programme includes works by three composers who have contemplated the catastrophic events and aftermath of 9/11, together with pieces by two American composers from earlier times. Together they form a memorial in sound, intangible, but arguably more moving than grand public monuments to the dead.

Composer and concert pianist **Karen Walwyn**, a native New Yorker, revisited the tragedy in *Reflections on 9/11*. The seven-movement cycle, the third and sixth of which will be heard this lunchtime, explores the long shadows cast by 9/11. Her score opens with an evocation of *That Day*, which would otherwise have been remembered, if remembered at all, for its cloudless sky and late summer heat. *Anguish* and *Burial* stand as complementary tone poems, the first charged with restless pianistic arpeggios and anxious melodic ideas, the latter a haunting elegy, its plaintive melodic line and mantra-like accompaniment imbued with hope.

Kevin Malone, Professor of Social and Autoethnographic Composition at the University of Manchester, was born and raised in New York. The Anglo-American composer has been drawn repeatedly to 9/11, absorbing its emotional affects and distilling them into eight works to date. The latest, commissioned by Adam Swayne to mark the event's twentieth anniversary, grew from Malone's visit in 2006 to the memorial in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, near the crash site of United Airlines Flight 93. He was moved by the messages, stuffed toys and other personal items attached to a ramshackle wire and concrete fence by visitors to the site, relatives and friends of the deceased among them. Their offerings effectively consecrated what was a temporary structure, transforming it from a field's boundary line into a shrine sacred to the memory of the forty passengers and crew hijacked and killed by four suicide bombers.

Sudden Memorials uses fragments of music and echoes of popular musical culture to build the aural equivalent of an unofficial, deeply meaningful monument to the dead. During the performance, the pianist is asked to seek invisible objects from within the piano, the score, and the air. These gestures coincide with the start of a musical 'object', some of which sound intimate or hesitant, others being extrovert or jarring. Malone structures his work in two sections, the first rich in found material – from hymn tunes and a high school basketball song to traces of Debussy and Chopin to an unruly fence of noise – and its counterpart suffused with what the composer describes as 'a

mysterious resonance which attempts to remember exactly what was lost, and yet, somehow, end the piece, but finds it difficult.' In the work's closing minutes, during which the pianist has the option to improvise, 'the pianist is attempting [to reach] the unobtainable'. *Sudden Memorials*, Malone observes, 'is dedicated to Adam, who is scheduled to give the première at Wigmore Hall, London on 11 Sept 2021 at 1pm, the exact hour in Britain twenty years on from the beginning of 9/11.'

David Del Tredici was originally destined for a career as a concert pianist until an encounter with a mean-spirited teacher nudged him towards composition. His mature works for solo piano often portray aspects of the composer's personal and artistic biography or memories of people or places close to his heart. *Missing Towers (Perpetual Canon)*, the third part of his four-part *Gotham Glory*, confronts the material and spiritual damage done to New York City on 9/11. 'The two voices in continuous canon with each other are my way of recalling those two significant buildings,' notes Del Tredici. 'At the very end, the pianist leaves the keyboard to play on the inside of the piano, a further expression of vanished glory.'

Adam Swayne has chosen to interleave his programme's 9/11 works with music by **Henry Cowell** and **Scott Joplin**. Revered as the high priest of American experimental music, Cowell left a lasting legacy as composer, author, teacher, publisher and polemicist; Joplin, another creative pioneer, was the son of a slave and a free-born black woman whose musical education was overseen and encouraged by his mother. *The Tides of Manaunaun*, like several of Cowell's early works, was inspired by Irish mythology. It recalls the tale of the god Manaunaun, whose gift it was to impart rhythmic, tidal motion to the particles of the cosmos so, as the composer put it, 'that they should remain fresh when the time came for their use in the building of the universe'.

Cowell ventured far beyond the tone colours of conventional western music to explore novel timbres and textures, not least those achieved by manipulating the piano's strings. *Aeolian Harp*, among the first works to use such techniques, depends chiefly on the sounds of plucked and strummed strings, with the keyboard used to outline a series of chords. Joplin's *Solace* reveals another facet of openness in American music. The wistful composition, subtitled 'A Mexican Serenade', taps the rhythmic roots of Latin American dance music as well as the African American ragtime tradition so closely associated with Joplin's name. Like Shanksville's memorial fence, *Solace* uses the stuff of popular culture to build a work that stands for calm, dignified reflection.

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