

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 13 April 2024
7.30pm

Elaine Mitchener vocalist

Apartment House

Kerry Yong piano

Sam Cave electric guitar

Ben Goldscheider horn

Heather Roche bass clarinet

Mira Benjamin violin

Gordon Mackay violin

Bridget Carey viola

Anton Lukoszevieve cello

Ben Michaels cello

Simon Limbrick percussion

Jack Sheen conductor

Elisabeth Lutyens (1906-1983)

Go, Said the Bird Op. 105 (1975)

Rolf Hind (b.1964)

Blue to the Throat (2024) *world première*

Blessing • Strch Prst Skrz Krk •

Whitethroat • The Syllables • Two Songs:

Furnace of Bliss • Blue to the Throat •

Cordhouse • Nodobotoke

Interval

Jack Sheen (b.1993)

Press (2024) *world première*

CLASSIC *fm*

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Elisabeth Lutyens is an essential composer in the canon of 20th Century British composers. She wrote a vast body of works and many are rarely performed today. 'Go, said the bird' is a line taken from the first of the *Four Quartets*, *Burnt Norton*, by TS Eliot, and is a composition for electric guitar and string quartet. 'Go, go, go said the bird: human kind Cannot bear very much reality'.

Disregarding the pop and rock music implications of the electric guitar, Lutyens focuses instead on the timbral and sonoristic possibilities of the instrument, pitting the guitar against the string quartet, which acts like a weird viol consort, providing shifting, harmonic chiaroscuro sounds. In later life, Lutyens often wrote pieces very quickly, sometimes in a matter of days. 'I have to work quickly because my conscious mind is so stupid, I can but trust that I have more interesting layers of mind'.

Rolf Hind's new work *Blue to the Throat* is a sequence of eight movements for the singer Elaine Mitchener and ensemble. Each of the movements takes a different view from philosophy, poetry and nature of the idea of the throat – or 'Cordhouse' as Dante Micheaux's eloquent new poem, written for this work, calls it.

The composer writes:

BLESSING

In conversations about this piece, John Gilhooly of Wigmore Hall referred me to the Catholic blessing of the throat, and its patron saint, Blaise. This short movement sets the scene with the singer being coaxed by the bass clarinet to 'find her voice', alongside material which will return, when she is in full song.

STRCH PRST SKRZ KRK

The title refers to the Czech tongue-twister, which could translate as 'stick a finger in the neck/ throat'. The music is a kind of violent, stompy *Ländler*, with wild parts for the instruments, particularly strings and guitar, and moments of horrified stillness. The voice tries to make the sounds of the tongue twister at certain points, shadowing or copying the percussionist, in the form of a palindrome.

WHITETHROAT

This movement was inspired by *The Great Animal Orchestra*, Bernie Krause's fascinating book, and particularly his description of the layers of sonic activity in a forest, where each animal or bird call has their own unique pitch space. Material from a later movement is divided between the instruments to re-create this, with the voice trying to find the beautiful, mellifluous sounds of the amber-listed Whitethroat bird, in a few improvised breaks.

THE SYLLABLES

In this movement, the singer begins to take charge, leading the other players in a recitation of the Sanskrit alphabet (or syllabary - there's always an implicit short

'A'), with increasing excitement and ending with the syllable 'HA'. This movement is like a warm-up exercise for a singer as music, as she grows in excitement, about to 'properly' sing...

TWO SONGS: FURNACE OF BLISS

The singer discovers melody... The texts are two poems by the great mystic poets Rumi and Kabir, which touch on the throat, communication, breathing and love.

BLUE TO THE THROAT

The penultimate movement, two texts are set and partly overlaid. The first, spoken by different players in the ensemble, is my own translation of part of the *Rig Veda* (the oldest Sanskrit text) telling the story of Shiva Nilkanth, the god with the blue throat, which went that colour when he drank all the poison from the oceans at the creation of the world. The second text is a poem, *Pigalle Bluethroat*, by the contemporary underground poet Henrik Aeshna. The poem consists of impressions from the life of a prostitute in contemporary Paris, with implications about her role clear from the title...

CORDHOUSE

The music leads to an intimate duet between voice and guitar, using a new poem by Dante Micheaux, written for and dedicated to Elaine Mitchener.

NODOBOTOKE

The Nodobotoke ('throat Buddha') is what we would call the Adam's apple. This is a delicate movement, a hummed farewell, using hollowed-out music from the second movement. It is dedicated, with love, to my late father, Christopher Hind.

Jack Sheen's new work *Press* for piano quintet is in three sections. The strings each have a different microtonal tuning, play mostly harmonics and are dampened by heavy, metal mutes. The quartet dominates the work, with the piano mostly providing resonance behind their harmonies and textures.

Like its sister piece, *Solo for Cello*, which was also premièred at Wigmore Hall in October 2022, *Press* acts like a fragile *moto perpetuo*, spinning ghostly fragments, through glitchy, stumbling rhythmic shapes, pulling the listener along as the music flickers in and out of aural perception. Although informed by long-form music associated with practices ranging from deep listening to ambient and drone, *Press* fills these spacious moulds with hyperactive, virtuosic and relentless music. Skewed arpeggios and splintered pointillism pervade the piece presenting panels of knotted patterns that constantly expand and contract. The listener's evolving sense of expectation and increasingly focused perception create the subtle drama of the piece. *Press* is in some senses a dessicated hauntology, yet it breathes, expands and propels us into the future.

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Elisabeth Lutyens (1906-1983)

Go, Said the Bird Op. 105 (1975)

Rolf Hind (b.1964)

Blue to the Throat (2024)

Blessing

Strch Prst Skrz Krk

Whitethroat

The Syllables

Two Songs: Furnace of Bliss

Rumi, trans. Coleman Barks

Kabir, trans. Andrew Harvey

Don't let your throat tighten
with fear. Take sips of breath
all day and night, before death
closes your mouth.

My body is flooded
With the flame of Love.
My soul lives in
A furnace of bliss.

Love's fragrance
Fills my mouth,
And fans through all things
With each outbreath.

Blue to the Throat

Hindu text, trans. Rolf Hind

Henrik Aeshna

Then the Great Lord, the WorldMaster -
cupping his hands, ate and drank the Halahala,
the poison that was everywhere.
That Dirtwater showed him its power
- a Blue to the Throat -
that the wise man wore as adornment

Pigalle Bluethroat

she's some kind of night shiva
under wraps of rose &
nicotine
acid-lipped staghorn-coral queen of this bar
opal-stained moroccan sky
& turbulent blue
like mingus liszt or piaf in days of thunder
talking & smiling to strangers
high on herself
dancing gracefully
in the middle of a forest fire
while drunken lads shatter bottles &
mirrors on street corners
the carnivorous neons of sexshops flicker &
scream on cathedral walls
& the waves crash on the rocks
of a distant shore

Cordhouse

Dante Micheaux

There is air in here;

walls wake with its sound. Air in here a song—
song of air and flesh.

Flesh enfolded viscera of truth, heavy air or light,
there is air in here.

Nodobotoke

Interval

Jack Sheen (b.1993)

Press (2024)