

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 13 May 2025  
7.30pm

Abel Selaocoe cello

Bernhard Schimpelsberger percussion

## SANSARA

Lucy Cox soprano  
Fiona Fraser soprano  
Daisy Walford soprano  
Clover Willis soprano  
Laura Baldwin alto  
Amy Blythe alto  
Anna Semple alto

Thomas Castle tenor  
Jacob Ewens tenor  
Will Wright tenor  
Jonathan Pratt bass  
Thomas Lowen bass  
Ben Tomlin bass  
Tom Herring artistic director,  
bass

Thomas Bennett bass\*  
Harry Brookes-Owen bass\*  
Tom Rayner bass\*  
Ben Cunningham bass\*

\*Tavener

Trad/South African

Nagula *arranged by Abel Selaocoe*

Trad/South African

Emmanuele (2024) *arranged by Abel Selaocoe & Fred Thomas*

Abel Selaocoe (b.1992)

Lerato (2022) *arranged by Fred Thomas*

John Tavener (1944-2013)

Svyati (1995)

*Interval*

Abel Selaocoe

Tsohle, tsohle (2025) *arranged by Abel Selaocoe & Fred Thomas*

Trad/South African

Bawo *arranged by Mzwandile Mabuza*

Johann Sebastian Bach

Sarabande from Cello Suite No. 6 in D BWV1012 (c.1720)  
*arranged by Fred Thomas*

Ola Gjeilo (b.1978)

Serenity (2010)

Trad/South African

Ulidzile *arranged by Abel Selaocoe*



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Please note the programme for this concert has changed since these notes were written.

The truly unique art of Abel Selaocoe is an acceptance of the true essence of all music as sound, existing in time – not, as painting or sculpture, immovable in space – an acceptance uniquely combining several distinct cultural strands: evolved European art music of the last half-millennium alongside traditional African sounds – in each area, equally divided between vocal and instrumental music. The contents and juxtapositions of tonight's programme are set to highlight the links between Western and non-Western musical traditions, to explore their universal linkages and expression without in any way attempting to place one above the other in human or aesthetic significance. In demonstrating such universalities, the sympathetic listener will surely find them encapsulated in the life and artistry of the multi-gifted musician Abel Selaocoe, who was born in Sebokeng, South Africa in 1992. His natural musical gifts were soon revealed and fully appreciated. Abel's chosen instrument is the cello, of which he began serious studies in Soweto, before winning a music scholarship to St John's College in Johannesburg where he was a student of the distinguished musician Michael Masote. At 18, Abel Selaocoe was granted a further scholarship at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, and moved to Britain. He graduated from the Royal Northern College in 2018, since when his career has taken him across the world, with performances, broadcasts and recordings with leading orchestras and soloists.

Despite his total familiarity with and mastery of the European classical cello repertoire, Abel Selaocoe has at all times sought to broaden the experience of what one might term traditional classical music audiences through a combination of traditional South African singing – he has a fine baritone voice of wide range, including folk throat singing – as well as mastering techniques of vocalised improvisations on native folk material alongside body percussion. Tonight, Abel Selaocoe's appearance with the noted vocal group SANSARA will give the audience further examples of the depth and range of perception that this remarkable artist's unique combination of both naturally (inherently South African folk-based) and trained vocal groupings can produce. The result is an exciting relatively recent expansion of the universal vocal musical palette.

Such expansion creates, as we have implied, a uniquely compelling fusion of Western-European and South African musical traditions, going further back in roots of musical history than Jazz (without ignoring that evolved tradition) – but the essence of course, as in all musical performances of whatever origin, is the wider expressive effect that such reinterpretation of both can convey. Here is surely an example of the inherent universality of music itself, and not merely in the broader sense, for the individual can doubtless experience the resultant message in purely musical terms. Such a result, entirely through such musical fusions and juxtapositions of identity, implies and demonstrates to the attentive listener a profound aesthetic which defines Selaocoe's art as being unique in the present-day concert and recital repertoire.

Nor is this something which has been overlooked or dismissed by what one might term the 'classical music' hierarchy, for Abel Selaocoe's natural total absorption of the western European classical music tradition together with that of his homeland has led to him performing at the BBC Proms in 2021 and appearing with the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Manchester Collective. He has also been appointed as an Artist-in-Residence at London's Southbank Centre; in addition, Abel was named the Royal Philharmonic Society's Instrumentalist of the Year in 2023.

In 2022, Abel Selaocoe was signed to Warner Classics records and has since released two albums. As the extraordinarily compelling series of recorded performances demonstrate, his debut album, *Where Is Home? (Hae Ke Kae)*, released in September 2022, has exceptionally varied musical tracks: one – *Africa is Back* – in which he is partnered by no less a figure than Yo-Yo Ma; another has a complete performance of the 18th-century Italian composer Giovanni Platti's Cello Sonata No. 7 in D; also on this disc, Selaocoe plays the *Sarabande* from JS Bach's Third Suite for Solo Cello, demonstrating that the album is an amalgam of the genuine universality of music in exploring themes of identity and belonging by way of a mix of original compositions and fully considered sympathetic reinterpretations of classical works.

As tonight's recital programme equally demonstrates, this astonishingly wide-ranging and exceptionally-gifted artist will lead a succession of such variety to reveal his personal musical destiny. The titles of the African songs read almost as a native cantata appealing to God: *Nagula-Ulidzile-Emmanuele-Bawo* [I lay down-To wait for-Emmanuel-Lord]. Immediately following the interval we hear the famous south African hymn *Tsohle, tsohle* ('Everything is Everything'), demonstrating the profound universality of music and its relationship to the contemporary human condition. The programme will also include one of **Abel Selaocoe's** original compositions, the song *Emmanuele*. This is taken from his second album, *Hymns of Bantu*, and has been described by Hugh Morris as being 'infectiously danceable ... after a stylish opening bassline, *Emmanuele* blossoms into a grooving hub of rhythms competing joyously before Selaocoe cycles through his wide vocabulary of vocal clicks, cries and overtones.'

Such examples from the rich instrumental and vocal variety of tonight's programme demonstrate the unique musical range and qualities of Abel Selaocoe – soloist, composer, musical group leader and wide-ranging vocalist – a true 'musical international' and musically aesthetic humanitarian who demonstrates through his art and selfless dedication an approach to music and its inherent communicative qualities across not only the centuries of the last half-Millennium but also shows the universality of music as a natural life-force, as valid in Northern Europe and Southern Africa as it has been since Man first discovered the emotions it can uniquely express.

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Abel Selaocoe will introduce the South African songs from the stage

Trad/South African

Nagula  
arranged by Abel Selaocoe

Trad/South African

Emmanuele (2024)  
arranged by Abel Selaocoe & Fred Thomas

Abel Selaocoe (b.1992)

Lerato (2022)  
arranged by Fred Thomas  
Abel Selaocoe

Love

Kena le lerato, lesa feleng	Lerato I have a love, a love that is infinite.
Le tsotellang lefatshe kabo phara	It cares for the world in abundance.
Hopola, hopola bo!	Remember, remember!
Re futsitse modimo ka lerato le lekana	We have inherited a deep love from God.
Lerato la modimo le kara ho wena	It lives in all of us.
Kena le lerato, lesa feleng	I have a love, a love that is infinite.
Le tsotellang lefatshe kabo phara	It cares for the world in abundance.
Kena le lerato, le tsamayang Lefathse kabo phara	I have a love that transcends The boundaries of our world.
La modimo hale fele	It is infinite,
Lerato leya tsotella	It cares for the world in abundance.
Efa ba bang	Pass it on.
Kena le lerato	I have love.
Le wena o le tshwere	And you have it too.
Fitisa fitisa	Pass it on pass it on.

John Tavener (1944-2013)

Svyati (1995)  
Church Slavonic

O Holy One

святой боже, святой крѣпкій,	Holy God, Holy and Strong,
святой безсмертный, помилуй насъ.	Holy and Immortal, have mercy upon us.

Interval

Abel Selaocoe

Tsohle, tsohle (2025)  
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Trad/South African

Bawo  
arranged by Mzwandile Mabuza

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Liturgical text

O great mystery

O magnum mysterium, et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum, iacentem in praesepio: Beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Christum. Alleluia.	O great mystery, and wondrous sacrament, that animals might see the Lord newborn, lying in a manger: Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to carry the Lord Christ. Alleluia.
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Trad/South African

Ulidzile  
arranged by Abel Selaocoe