

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 13 September 2023
7.30pm

This concert is supported by American Friends of Wigmore Hall

The 4 Elements

Brooklyn Rider

Johnny Gandelsman violin • Colin Jacobsen violin
Nicholas Cords viola • Michael Nicolas cello

Colin Jacobsen (b.1978)

A Short While To Be Here (based on American Folk Songs as collected by Ruth Crawford Seeger) (2023) *UK première*

*I. Whoa, Mule! • II. Hommage à Ruth •
III. Peep Squirrel • IV. The Old Cow Died •
V. Little Birdie*

Akshaya Tucker (b.1992)

Hollow Flame (2022) *UK première*

*Chant-like, through a cathedral of trees - Suddenly bright -
Frenzied - The Earth - Echoes of the empty forest*

Andreia Pinto Correia (b.1971)

Aere senza stelle (2022) *UK première*

*Lacrimoso, quasi recitativo - Agitato, strepitoso -
Misterioso, senza misura. Inquieto*

Henri Dutilleux (1916-2013)

Ainsi la nuit (1973-6)

*Introduction • I. Nocturne • Parenthèse 1 •
II. Miroir d'espace • Parenthèse 2 • III. Litanies •
Parenthèse 3 • IV. Litanies 2 • Parenthèse 4 •
V. Constellations • VI. Nocturne 2 • VII. Temps suspendu*

Interval

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No. 8 in C minor Op. 110 (1960)

*I. Largo • II. Allegro molto • III. Allegretto •
IV. Largo • V. Largo*

Oswaldo Golijov (b.1960)

Tenebrae (2002)

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Colin Jacobsen A Short While To Be Here (based on American Folk Songs as collected by Ruth Crawford Seeger) (UK première)

We have a 'short while to be here, and a long time to be gone', as the lyrics go on the American folksong 'Little Birdie'. Astronaut Loren Acton described his experience looking down at our home planet Earth from above:

Looking outward to the blackness of space, sprinkled with the glory of a universe of lights, I saw majesty - but no welcome. Below was a welcoming planet. There, contained in the thin, moving, incredibly fragile shell of the biosphere is everything that is dear to you, all the human drama and comedy. That's where life is; that's where all the good stuff is.

In writing this piece, I was very much inspired by the example of Ruth Crawford Seeger, once one of America's most forward-looking composers of the early part of the 20th Century. Then her life took a turn in Depression-era America as she and her husband Charles Seeger began a deep investigation of American folk music alongside the Lomax brothers during the FDR years. She treated folk music with the respect and attention that Béla Bartók had exhibited in a somewhat parallel fashion in Europe, and as an educator became deeply committed to teaching folksongs to children. She published several collections of American folksongs for children, including the *Animal Folk Songs for Children*. She also raised four children of her own during that challenging time, several of whom became icons of the folk-revival movement in the generation to come (step-son Pete Seeger, and her own children Peggy and Mike Seeger). For around 20 years, her personal compositional voice was silent, but in 1952, she wrote one last modernist composition, a wind quintet, before falling ill and eventually succumbing to cancer. I like to imagine what would have happened if she had lived longer and had attempted to further integrate her life's work - her love of folk music alongside her formalist/composerly voice. So this piece, representing Earth in our Four Elements project, is very much an homage to Ruth (nicknamed 'Dio' by her children) as well as a joyous celebration of our home planet. This of course includes all animals and children past and present who've been here or will be here a short while and then gone for a long time...

© Colin Jacobsen

Akshaya Tucker Hollow Flame (UK première)

Here in California, fire is at our doorstep. Although I am a relatively new arrival to the state, it's still frightening. Fire has already had a devastating impact especially on Northern Californian communities (and completely wiped out the town of Paradise in 2018). Across California, we have been experiencing extreme drought for years. All these conditions, from drought to fire to mudslides, are predicted to worsen as our planet warms.

My string quartet, *Hollow Flame*, is like a journal entry of moments recorded over many months in which I try to

grapple with what is happening in the climate crisis: the loss of so much, from human lives to old-growth forests, let alone human health and the well-being of our ecosystems. *Hollow Flame* is an attempt to witness my own numbness, my own inability to even form words when I try to talk about this. The sections of the piece (as listed within the score) are as follows: *Chant-like, through a cathedral of trees; Suddenly bright; Frenzied; The Earth; and Echoes of the empty forest.*

My research for this project began in 2020, and led me through a number of writings on the climate crisis. My participation in Composing Earth, a program from the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music, has been essential throughout this process. Something like a book club or a support group, this program has opened a space for all the difficult feelings the climate crisis creates in us: grief, fear, anxiety, empathy, anger. Researching this topic, alone at first, felt extremely isolating, even impossible. But in a group, however small, we could share our experiences, and know that - *no, we aren't crazy* - for feeling maddeningly frustrated by the apathy of millions, by our own numbness.

I want to commend Brooklyn Rider for their courage in choosing this topic, which is so difficult to write and speak about; and I am grateful to Bagaduce Music and Carnegie Hall for co-commissioning this piece.

© Akshaya Tucker

Co-commissioned for Brooklyn Rider's *Four Elements* project by Bagaduce Music and Carnegie Hall.

Andreia Pinto Correia Aere senza stelle (UK première)

The inspiration for *Aere senza stelle* ('Air without stars') was the *tempestades de poeira* - or dust storms - that travel from the Sahara Desert to the Iberian Peninsula, a phenomenon experienced during my youth in Portugal. From the descriptions of 'blood rains' as bad omens in epics by Homer, Hesiod and Plutarch, to scientific observations by Darwin and Ehrenberg in the 19th Century, up until today, the reporting of desert dust storms has evolved from descriptive narratives to encompass an entire field of environmental research.

Re-reading Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, I recognised a profound poetic connection to climate change, and so I mirrored the structure of Canto III, 22-30, dividing the work into three sections. In the final measures, the string quartet creates a sonic cloud, as though carrying an infinite stream of particles from the desert to other parts of the world.

Lacrimoso, quasi recitativo – the starless air: lyrical and static.

Agitato, strepitoso – a tumult of voices: dense, angular and dissonant.

Misterioso, senza misura. Inquieto – time suspended. A whirlwind of sands, vanishing into infinity.

Commissioned by the 2022 Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel - Artistic Director - *Aere senza stelle* is dedicated in admiration to António Guterres, for his

lifelong dedication to climate change issues, and to Catarina Vaz Pinto. A special thank you to Brooklyn Rider.

© Andreia Pinto Correia

Dutilleux *Ainsi la nuit*

Completed in 1976, Henri Dutilleux's *Ainsi la nuit* ('Thus the night') is one of the greatest works for string quartet written in the second half of the 20th Century. Non-programmatic, it is rather a surreal musical meditation on the idea of night in all of its guises; calm, transcendence, premonition, ecstasy, dreams, nightmares. This singular work achieves a couple of notable feats. One is a near miraculous balance between complexity and transparency. Even when the music is at its most dense, the myriad events feel suspended in air, an element which practically serves as the fifth member of the ensemble. It is also achieves another delicate balance; while incredibly virtuosic (both compositionally and instrumentally), this work always manages to invite the listener beyond its material façade into the beguiling and surreal atmospheres that these techniques serve to create.

Dutilleux had a long-standing fascination with Marcel Proust's concept of memory as expressed in *Remembrance of Things Past*. *Ainsi la nuit* utilises a unique formal structure to create a sense of interconnectedness and a fluid unfolding of events. The seven principal movements are performed continuously, with transitional 'parentheses' often serving as connective tissue. Reluctant to state full themes at their outset, Dutilleux uses incomplete fragments of melodies, harmonic/pitch relationships and the technique of continual development to create a sense of organic connection. In fact, it would not be unusual to experience a sense of *déjà vu* as the music unfurls. The resulting fantastical music depicts a complex web of memory and consciousness; something central to our human experience, but highly elusive to express.

© Nicholas Cords

Shostakovich String Quartet No. 8 in C minor Op. 110

Dmitri Shostakovich's explosive Eighth String Quartet was written in just three days in 1960 while visiting Dresden to write music for the film *Five Days and Five Nights* about the Allied firebombing of that city in World War II. Dedicated to 'the victims of fascism and war,' the extra-musical meaning of the work has long been debated. Is it an autobiographical statement about the composer's struggles against the Stalinist regime, a reference to the Holocaust, or a rebuke to totalitarianism? While we will never ultimately know, this beloved work has nevertheless secured a place as one of the most important and searingly powerful pieces of the 20th Century.

The basic building block of the five-movement composition is based on the spelling of the composer's name DSCH (D-E-flat-C-B), heard in the fugal opening of the first movement. The second movement reveals an iconic Jewish theme also heard in the composer's famous Second Piano Trio. The composer describes his feelings on the qualitative elements of Jewish music in *Testimony*: 'Jewish folk music has made a most powerful impression on me... it can appear to be happy while it is tragic. It's almost always laughter through tears. This quality... is close to my ideas of what music should be. There should always be two layers in music. Jews were tormented so long that they learned to hide their despair. They express despair in dance music.' Following the third movement's macabre waltz, the fourth movement unfolds in a series of quotations. Opening with a series of ominous knockings, an inverted DSCH statement is juxtaposed, revealing a fragment of the *Dies irae* from the Catholic Requiem Mass. Following this, the lower three instruments play a Russian funeral anthem (*...tormented by the weight of bondage, you glorify death with honor...*), followed by the two violins sounding the Russian revolutionary song 'Languishing in prison'. Later in the movement, a soaringly transcendent cello melody from Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* serves as an emotional crest, followed by an elegiac and contrapuntal reprise of the DSCH theme in the concluding movement.

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Oswaldo Golijov *Tenebrae*

I wrote *Tenebrae* as a consequence of witnessing two contrasting realities in a short period of time in September 2000. I was in Israel at the start of the new wave of violence that is still continuing today, and a week later I took my son to the new planetarium in New York, where we could see the Earth as a beautiful blue dot in space. I wanted to write a piece that could be listened to from different perspectives. That is, if one chooses to listen to it 'from afar', the music would probably offer a 'beautiful' surface but, from a metaphorically closer distance, one could hear that, beneath that surface, the music is full of pain. I lifted some of the haunting melismas from Couperin's *Troisième Leçon de ténèbres*, using them as sources for loops, and wrote new interludes between them, always within a pulsating, vibrating, aerial texture. The compositional challenge was to write music that would sound like an orbiting spaceship that never touches ground. After finishing the composition, I realised that *Tenebrae* could be heard as the slow, quiet reading of an illuminated medieval manuscript in which the appearances of the voice singing the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet (from Yod to Nun, as in Couperin) signal the beginning of new chapters, leading to the ending section, built around a single, repeated word: *Jerusalem*.

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