

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 18 December 2022  
3.00pm

## Echo

Ruby Hughes soprano  
Huw Watkins piano

- Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Sarabande from Partita No. 4 in D BWV828 (1728)
- Henry Purcell (1659-1695) Music for a while from *Incidental music for Oedipus, King of Thebes* Z583 (1692) *arranged by Michael Tippett*
- By beauteous softness mixed with majesty from *Now Does the Glorious Day Appear (Ode for Queen Mary's Birthday)* Z332 (1689) *arranged by Thomas Adès*
- Huw Watkins (b.1976) Echo (2017)  
*Echo • For each ecstatic instant •  
If grief could burn out • When You Are Old •  
Baby Blue*
- Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) I wonder as I wander *based on John Jacob Niles*  
How sweet the answer (1957)
- Deborah Pritchard (b.1977) The World (2021)
- Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b.1980) Lament (2012)
- Errollyn Wallen (b.1958) Peace on Earth (2006)

### Friends of Wigmore Hall – celebrating 30 years of friendship

Over the past 30 years, Friends have been providing transformational support for the Hall, ensuring this historic building remains a home for great music making. Enjoy the benefits of friendship by joining as a Friend today, and be a part of the Wigmore story. Visit: [wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends) | Call: 020 7258 8230

FRIENDS OF  
WIGMORE HALL

30

*Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.*

*In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.*

*Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.*

*Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.*



*Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.*

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838  
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://Wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG  
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

Department  
for Culture  
Media & Sport

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

Registered with  
**FUNDRAISING  
REGULATOR**

This beautiful recital is – among many other things – a conversation between past and present, and the expressive and emotional ‘echoes’ that still resonate from years ago. It is a dialogue between composers across the centuries, strongly imbued with a sense of melancholy and ‘lost time’. Huw Watkins’s song cycle *Echo* stands at the centre: symbolising poetic and musical echoes over hundreds of years, as well as the power of memory and loss. Running like a thread throughout are poems meditating on the human condition and its relationship to the natural world and beyond – from Yeats’s ‘crowd of stars’ to Vaughan’s ecstatic sighting of eternity. There are two seasonal moments: Britten’s haunting arrangement of ‘I wonder as I wander,’ and Errollyn Wallen’s carol ‘Peace on Earth’, the latter expressing the hopeful quality of so many Christmas carols; inviting a shared sense of community, even if briefly.

The concert starts – as so many musical journeys do – with **Bach**. His stately *Sarabande* from Partita No. 4 in D is an elegant, but surprisingly dissonant introduction, foreshadowing the more complex harmonies of the later works. As Watkins has said, having Bach played on the modern piano makes it sound both contemporary *and* ‘nostalgic’; and the same paradox could be applied to the two **Purcell** arrangements, the first of which is from the great Purcell revival of the 1940s. **Tippett**’s ‘Music for a while’ is faithful to Purcell’s original style, with its ‘walking bass’ under increasingly ornamental vocal lines. **Thomas Adès** makes full use of the piano register in his ‘By beauteous softness mixed with majesty’ (written originally for Queen Mary’s birthday), with a lengthy piano postlude after the voice has stopped.

There are echoes to be heard at the start of **Watkins**’s cycle – or at least, a yearning to catch one still resonating from long ago. The opening song, the longest of the group, sets Christina Rossetti’s poem *Come to me in the silence of the night* to wistful, high-lying piano arpeggios and a beautiful, long-breathed vocal line, while in the shortest song (‘For each ecstatic instant’) the arpeggios become more angry, more jagged. Watkins’s affinity with Philip Larkin’s verse is evident in the third song, with its protagonist hollowed out by grief. The fourth – a setting of Yeats’s famous *When You are Old* – is unlike other, more gentle interpretations of this poem (such as Frank Bridge’s from 1919). Instead, it has a disturbing energy, reflective of the passionate history hinted at in the second verse. The final song is both tender and declamatory, setting an enigmatic and disturbing poem by David Harsent. The voice sings only briefly

at the centre of this song, with the piano taking on the expressive duties once the words fade away.

**Britten** was a composer in constant conversation with the past – through his own Bach and Purcell arrangements, but also through his sensitive, highly individual re-workings of traditional songs. ‘I wonder as I wander’ is certainly traditional in flavour, although it was in fact composed as recently as 1933 by **John Jacob Niles** (who took pains after its first performance to ensure he was credited as its composer). He later recalled hearing a fragment of the melody which became ‘I wonder’ sung by a young girl while he was collecting folksongs: ‘She smiled as she sang, smiled rather sadly, and sang only a single line of a song’. Britten’s arrangement alternates piano and voice throughout, with the piano seeming to take inspiration from the ‘bird on the wing’ in the third verse for its interventions. A similar call-and-refrain quality can be found in his version of Thomas Moore’s folksong. The first line – ‘How sweet the answer Echo makes’ – sets the scene for the song as a whole, with the voice and piano sweetly echoing each other’s rocking melodic lines, repeating ‘again, again, again’ at the song’s close.

Songs by three contemporary composers complete the programme, and along with the other works here explore the beauty and unbearable tenderness of life as well as regret for its passing. In **Deborah Pritchard**’s ‘The World’ the song’s protagonist ‘sees eternity’. The abstract concept is described as a visual phenomenon – ‘a ring of pure and endless light’ – a ‘synaesthetic’ experience that Pritchard (a composer who ‘hears’ colour) has no trouble identifying with. She sets the poem to an ecstatic vocal line, richly harmonised by the piano, sounding at times like the music of a fellow synaesthetist composer, Olivier Messiaen. **Cheryl Frances-Hoad** sets the achingly sad ‘Lament’, a poem by Andrew Motion. The piano’s repeated refrain (a rising two-note motif) sounds rather like Debussy’s ‘Footsteps in the snow’ (*Des pas sur la neige*), and punctuates the slow-moving, elegiac vocal line. The piano eventually leaves the voice to continue its journey alone. Finally, **Errollyn Wallen**’s ‘Peace on Earth’ – originally composed as a choral piece – has a pristine, meditative quality, with its repeated, climbing refrain and falling, frosty piano figures. Despite the wintry cold, Wallen’s carol has a message of goodwill, fading into repetitions of ‘Peace on Earth’, with an implied multitude of other voices.

© Lucy Walker 2022

*Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.*

**Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750)

**Sarabande from Partita No. 4 in D BWV828**  
(1728)

**Henry Purcell** (1659-1695)

**Music for a while from *Incidental music for Oedipus, King of Thebes Z583*** (1692)  
arranged by Michael Tippett  
*John Dryden/Nathaniel Lee*

Music for a while  
Shall all your cares beguile:  
Wond'ring how your pains were eas'd,  
And disdain to be pleas'd,  
Till Alecto free the dead  
From their eternal bands,  
Till the snakes drop from her head,  
And the whip from out her hands.  
Music for a while  
Shall all your cares beguile.

**By beauteous softness mixed with majesty  
from *Now Does the Glorious Day Appear (Ode  
for Queen Mary's Birthday) Z332*** (1689)  
*Henry Purcell, after Thomas Shadwell*

By beauteous softness mixed with majesty  
An empire over every heart she gains;  
And from her awful power none could be free  
She with such sweetness and such justice reigns.

**Huw Watkins** (b.1976)

**Echo** (2017)

**Echo**  
*Christina Rossetti*

Come to me in the silence of the night;  
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;  
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright  
As sunlight on a stream;  
Come back in tears,  
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

O dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,  
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,  
Where souls brimfull of love abide and meet;  
Where thirsting longing eyes  
Watch the slow door  
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live  
My very life again though cold in death:  
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give  
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:  
Speak low, lean low,  
As long ago, my love how long ago.

**For each ecstatic instant**  
*Emily Dickinson*

For each ecstatic instant  
We must an anguish pay  
In keen and quivering ratio  
To the ecstasy.

For each beloved hour  
Sharp pittances of years,  
Bitter contested farthings  
And coffers heaped with tears.

**If grief could burn out**  
*Philip Larkin*

If grief could burn out  
Like a sunken coal,  
The heart would rest quiet,  
The unrent soul  
Be still as a veil;  
But I have watched all night

The fire grow silent,  
The grey ash soft:  
And I stir the tubborn flint  
The flames have left,  
And grief stirs, and the deft  
Heart lies impotent.

**When You Are Old**  
*WB Yeats*

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true,  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

## Baby Blue

David Harsent

She might be singing 'My buttie, my lolly, my blue-eyed  
boy'

As she stoops to take him up in joy,

Then stops on a broken note, her own eyes full  
As she catches a glimpse of the sky through the skull.

## Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

### I wonder as I wander

based on John Jacob Niles

*Traditional*

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,  
How Jesus our Saviour did come for to die,  
For poor or'n'ry people like you and like I,  
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow stall,  
With wise men and shepherds and farmers and all.  
On high from God's heaven the star's light did fall,  
And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,  
A star in the sky, or a bird on the wing;  
Or all of God's angels in heav'n for to sing,  
He surely could've had it for he was the King!

### How sweet the answer (1957)

Thomas Moore

How sweet the answer Echo makes  
To Music at night,  
When, rous'd by lute or horn, she wakes,  
And far away, o'er lawns and lakes,  
Goes answering light.

Yet love hath echoes truer far,  
And far more sweet,  
Than e'er beneath the moonlight's star,  
Of horn, or lute, or soft guitar,  
The songs repeat.

'Tis when the sigh, in youth sincere,  
And only then -  
The sigh, that's breath'd for one to hear,  
Is by that one, that only dear,  
Breath'd back again.

## Deborah Pritchard (b.1977)

### The World (2021)

Henry Vaughan

I saw Eternity the other night,  
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,  
All calm, as it was bright;  
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,  
Driv'n by the spheres  
Like a vast shadow mov'd; in which the world  
And all her train were hurl'd.

## Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b.1980)

### Lament (2012)

Andrew Motion

Stones cried out  
But he never heard them.  
Hills cupped him  
In their cracked hands  
But he slipped through  
Into the gold fire.

Now that he has been  
Flown back to me  
I must wash the dust  
From his feet and face  
Until I know him  
As he was in the beginning.

Then we shall walk out  
Together as before  
Hand in hand  
Through the streets and the parks  
Where birds sing  
When the rain passes away.

## Errollyn Wallen (b.1958)

### Peace on Earth (2006)

Errollyn Wallen

And snow falls down on me.  
Peace on earth.  
The night is dark and soft.  
Peace on earth.  
The lights that sparkle in the square,  
The smoke that lingers in the air.  
Peace on earth.

And grace falls down on me.  
Peace on earth.  
The dark will turn aside.  
Peace on earth.  
The fires that burn in every hearth  
Do sing our praise of Christmas past.  
Peace on earth.

Hear them singing.

Peace on earth.

*Peace on Earth text by Errollyn Wallen, printed with permission from  
Peters Edition Limited.*