

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 21 June 2023
7.30pm

Fantasy in Orange

Explore Ensemble

Taylor MacLennan flutes
Alex Roberts clarinets
Sarah Park piano, keyboard
David López Ibañez violin
Amy Tress violin
Morag Robertson viola
Deni Teo cello
Nakul Krishnamurthy electronics, recorded voice
Nicholas Moroz electronics, artistic director

Pascale Criton (b.1954)

Clines (1989)

Nakul Krishnamurthy

One Million Dancing Shivas (2023) *world première*
Commissioned by Explore Ensemble with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, the RVW Trust, and the Hinrichsen Foundation.

Interval

Clara Iannotta (b.1983)

dead wasps in the jam-jar (iii) (2019)

Alex Paxton (b.1990)

Spit Crystal Yeast-rack, dripping. (Á l'orange) (2023)
world première
Commissioned by Explore Ensemble with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, the Hinrichsen Foundation, the RVW Trust, and the Genesis Foundation Kickstart Fund. Co-commissioned by Wigmore Hall and the Schleswig Holstein Musik Festival.

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This evening's concert presents an eclectic selection of chamber works that explore contrasting senses of time and fantastical imagery, ranging from sloping and jagged mountain landscapes, to religious icons, the intense pressures of the deep sea, and multicoloured kaleidoscopes; spanning the ecstatic, haunted and sublime.

Pascale Criton's *Clines* presents two distinct layers: on the one hand, electronic sounds of rich metallic and microtonally-tuned resonances that Criton synthesised with IRCAM's Réson programme in 1986, and modelled on piano, bell, crotales, and cimbalom timbres; on the other hand, the instrumental quintet offers warmer, more humane material redolent of the natural world, with arching melodies and ebullient filigree. A synthesised piano in the electronics part perhaps stands out in its artificiality by today's standards, but at the same time, also points to the live piano as an intermediary figure between the musicians and electronics. These two contrasting layers—tempered and non-tempered—constantly shift in relation to one another; sometimes complementing, and at other times conflicting; the electronics like crystal shards, and the quintet as though overgrowth.

The title is a word local to the South of France, where Criton grew up. 'Clines' are the various dips and crevices on the mountain sides that make them difficult to traverse. Referring to this geological metaphor, she describes the pieces as 'a surface-landscape that unfolds slowly, almost ecstatic, traversed by fast flows and intense moments'.

Nakul Krishnamurthy's *One Million Dancing Shivas* also shares a sense of flux among its many layers, although with an alternative earthly sense of time and space that steps outside of western 'clock time'. This new piece follows from his earlier work for recorded voice and electronics, *Ten Thousand Dancing Shivas*, released in 2020 on Cafe Oto's OTOROKU label.

In the original version, Krishnamurthy performs the piece by triggering pre-recorded vocal samples of himself singing in a style that hovers between Carnatic and Hindustani. The recorded phrases, around 60 in total, cover a range of registers, melodic archetypes, and expressions. While the way in which he triggers the phrases makes use of chance methods, he still maintains control of the overall form, that of gradual growth, achieving a balance between the parts and whole where every performance is different as it renews the assembly of materials.

In this revision, the players of the quintet have chosen several of the vocal phrases and adapted them to suit their instruments while still maintaining the original vocal contours and styles. As an additional faint glistening synth layer emerges, the phrases gradually accumulate and interweave into ever thicker textures, blurring the boundaries between recorded and live sound. The prominence of gliding tones and subtle colourations of tone also adds to the a fused sense of horizontal and vertical, melodic and harmonic, or the dissolving of linear time and space.

These emergent wandering loops that never repeat exactly the same are Krishnamurthy's way to escape a sense of 'uni-directional' time, and to instead explore multiple circular times that continually renew themselves and

fluctuate in their holds with one another. The title refers to Indian mythology and Shiva, the God of Death, whose dance is the source of all motion and vibration in the universe.

Clara Iannotta's *dead wasps in the jam-jar (iii)* lifts its title from the poetry of Dorothy Molloy, and is the third in a series of pieces comprising of two other works for solo violin and string orchestra. The series highlights a sound world of prepared strings, where the instruments use various metal and wood mutes as well as circular paperclips threaded on the strings. These physical interventions denature and distort the instruments' familiar resonant characteristics, as if revealing some hidden sonic sinews or ghostly inner voice.

While composing the piece, Iannotta imagined a deep-sea environment, 'the lowest layer of the ocean, where constant pressure and perpetual movement seem to shape the stillness of time'. In this quartet, we can hear this haunted, inhumane habitat where the slow undulating motions of its resident shadowy creatures skulk and slide along spiky surfaces. At charged moments, a layer of the simplest electronic sound, sine tones, ring out in contrast to the noise clouds of heavily meditated instruments, as though beams of light shining through at us from far within the vast abyss.

Alex Paxton's *Spit Crystal Yeast-rack, dripping. (À l'orange)* presents something entirely different to all the music that has come before in this concert: a roller coaster that, with its relentless pace and wild energy (MM = 196), pushes chamber musicianship to its limit while still being composed of seemingly familiar musical components rendered extraordinary.

Multiplicity of time is again another link to the other works in this concert. Paxton's music throws together competing layers of materials that run at different speeds and rhythmic feels, each one constantly battling for attention, from the sped-up swung jazz tunes and erratic drum track in the opening section, to the dancy mock-Baroque riffs and torrents of orchestral sounds and scales that power the music in later sections.

The musicians also have to assume multiple roles in a more literal sense. The keyboard sampler contains multi-layered tuneful whistles, groans, screams, organ blasts, and wonky synth orchestras. The woodwinds also play kazoos, sing, and at one point the flautist takes three slide whistles taped together to create a shimmering chorus effect. At other times, the strings and keyboards sing along with their melodies in a 'Glenn Gould or Keith Jarrett' manner. Throughout, Paxton encourages the players to 'earnestly personalise the details beyond what is written on the page, as if playing in a band.'

Beyond multiplicity of time and rhythm, Paxton's music is even more so a vivid and rough-tumble multiplicity of emotion, music, and personas; a collage where the superabundance of perspectives and energy manifests with violent urgency as a joy that constantly risks imploding in on itself as it tries to say everything all at once. The piece isn't 'about' anything in particular, as the title gets at, but creates its own paradoxical world of teeming multicolour life, absurdity, Boschian sarcasm, and exuberance for us to share.

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