

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 22 February 2025  
1.00pm

This concert is supported by the John S Cohen Foundation and The Radcliffe Trust

## Wigmore Hall Voices of Today: Alex Tay

### EXAUDI

James Weeks conductor  
Cressida Sharp soprano  
Tom Williams countertenor  
David de Winter tenor  
Simon Whiteley bass

### GBSR Duo

George Barton percussion  
Siwan Rhys keyboards

Joe Bates electronic artist

Linda Catlin Smith (b.1957)

The Lighthouse *world première*  
Commissioned by Alex Tay with the generous support of Hinrichsen

Cassie Kinoshi (b.1993)

dreams as vivid in my eyes as orchids ii *world première*  
Commissioned by Alex Tay with the generous support of the RVW Trust

Joe Bates

Paroles Gelées *world première*  
Commissioned by Alex Tay with the generous support of the RVW Trust

Alex Tay

money & yes *world première*  
Commissioned by Wigmore Hall with the generous support of the Marchus Trust and the Wigmore Hall Endowment Fund



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It's my showcase! For one day only, I'm a Voice of Today and I've used my Today to get a few other Voices of Today to join me on stage, or at least get quite close while another group (onstage) speaks on our behalf. And what a heroic group! Exaudi Vocal Ensemble and GBSR Duo, two ensembles who have taken on a titanic mythos in the NEW MUSIC world. And together for the first time! The two ensembles match each other perfectly in character, interests and focus. Aesthetically, it's also a no-brainer: Stravinsky already proved how addictive the bright attack of percussion and piano is with vocal sustain.

Who'd give them something worth their time? Enter, **Linda Catlin Smith, Cassie Kinoshi and Joe Bates**. Textually, Catlin Smith's arranged Browne and Cowper around fragments from Virginia Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*. In Catlin's own words: 'For me, the piece is working with the image of the constant movement of the sea; the observer is describing the sea and sky, but there is also the sense that when the sea is rough, there is the lighthouse to offer guidance, which I take to resonate with the inner depths and trials within a self; that the beauty of the world can be a kind of guiding principle in troubled times.'

These images seem to offer Catlin Smith a way into re-contextualising her existing interests in distance; distorted, evolving circularities; and long, hypermetric phrases which contract and expand. Carefully painted melodies, as if from Lily Briscoe's brush, undulate between the voices. The texturally enmeshed piano and vibraphone trade almost-imitations. Between their aperiodic clusters, for pulse is at sea too, pandiatonicisms coloured with locrian, phrygian and false relationships, emerge as aggregates washed in ocean waves. Select events break the work's continuity: twice, at the words 'sky' and 'deeper gulfs', the register expands to the depths of the piano and heights of the vibraphone. The introduction of repeated arpeggiations of a E-D-F trichord and a vibraphone tremolo on the notes C and D signify the work's closing.

Similarly, Kinoshi's contribution has a literary inspiration and is informed by Rilke's poem, dreams as vivid in my eyes as orchids. The text has stirred two pieces from Kinoshi, the first being written for amplified flute, soundscape and console controller and performed by House of Bedlam. This second iteration, composed quite differently for GBSR, was conceived of as an improvisation that Kinoshi made on a Roland Juno 60. The resulting soundscape is comprised of an arpeggiated bassline and occasional sustains higher in the register, which add resonance. Where Catlin is vertically rich and horizontally spacious, Kinoshi stays vertically lean, opting to use doublings from GBSR to draw different colours and emphases from the soundscape. Powerful and epic as the poem, the arpeggiated figure is drawn through

modal transformations, compressing and expanding in additive groupings, as if through the stem of a transdimensional orchid.

I saw Bates perform his piece *Ceasing* with SANSARA in 2023. After being totally blown away by his meld of eight voices with live electronic effects, I picked his brain and learned that *Ceasing* was actually just the beginning; he'd been dreaming in choir of Rabelais. More specifically there's a passage he wanted to set in the *Fourth Book of Pantegruel*, where the titular giant and his companions discover 'frozen words' that fall from the heavens as hail. In Joe's own words: 'As they melt, sounds emerge: in this passage, the sounds of the colours of heraldry ring out.'

Bates has developed a sophisticated yet uncomplicated set of mechanisms to transform Exaudi's voices with electronic effects *in situ*. Such an act requires the careful manipulations of a backstage conjurer, a role that he is performing today as an electronic artist. The piece allows Bates to develop another aspect of his practice further. Without irony, he augments contemporary understandings of tonal systems with microtones. In particular, he allows harmonics 7, 11 and 21 to give a metallic bite to the harmony, perhaps evoking Rabelais's ringing colours of heraldry. Neutral chords (in between major and minor) and subminor chords (the minor third is narrowed) enrich his vocabulary too. Bates 'freezes' and vocodes the voices as they process in their texturally Josquin-like form towards a D minor pedal, which arrives as the voices release the words from their frozen state: colours abound! The D minor pedal widens to a D neutral chord and the F quarter sharp becomes the 11th harmonic on a C spectrum which dominates until the voices recede back to a contemplative E minor.

Lastly, me. The piece is loosely inspired by the life and death of American billionaire, ex-CEO of Zappos, venture capitalist and author of *Delivering Happiness*, Tony Hsieh; who had Taiwanese heritage, which I only mention because I probably wouldn't have taken much notice of his story if he and I didn't have this commonality. He died in a fire and it's not clear whether he intended to take his own life or not. His life ended at a point when he was trying to biohack sleep and he believed he was turning into a crystal. A constant inflow of Nitrous Oxide spawned notorious and erratic behaviour. He surrounded himself with users, paid to make him happy.

I couldn't help but read my and so many people around me's lives into his: second-generation over-compensations for an unchosen otherness; a facade of lateral playfulness cultivated against the fear that no one really loves you; a dissonant desire to both uplift and crush everyone around you.

The text takes images from his life, references to nitrous, crystals, fire, his book, shoes (Zappos is a shoe company), toads (Venture Frogs was his first investing firm), radon rivers, worms (his first taste of business was mining a worm farm) and mountains (his move to Utah) form a surreal kaleidoscope of images told through a first-person narrative as this fictionalised Hsieh approaches Nirvana. It was 5am when Gareth Matthey received my first draft-as-stream-of-consciousness (thanks Gareth for making it good!).

How to represent this - the decadent self-destruction, the 'crystalline eternal', desperate calls to prayer without answer (the phrase 'Deo Gracias' reverberates throughout), the feeling of isolation despite being surrounded by so many, the fragmenting sense of self - in music? The piece relies on samplers which allow two subtle microtonal drifts in opposite directions - by the time you realise it's too late. From the vertical combination of these samplers with equal temperament, uncomfortably bright, crystalline extended *Just Intonation* chords ring out. Vocal figures, melodies and ornamentations that derive from medieval, Corsican and Greek polyphonies (thank you Thomas Fournil and Idrîsi Ensemble!) rejoice in Hsieh's nitrous bliss. The timbre palettes chosen for GBSR, majorly inspired by Oli Leith, include wobbly synthetic vibraphones, garish

Rhodes samples, cut screams and lightly vocoded synthesis. And then there's time, which I wanted desperately to fragment, teleport and fold itself inside out. And so the tempo slows, turns the other way, mercurially pulls in opposite directions, tears at it's own fabric, grinding at the perfumed lamento-exultations housed within.

Anti-Buddha congeals out of a mirror of a mirror. Junkie Siddhartha chases that hit of validation through success manifested as money, so the piece is called money & yes.

The piece is dedicated to my friend and fantastic violinist En Yuan Khong. I'd like to thank Wigmore Hall, John Gilhooly, Gareth Matthey, James Weeks, Cressida Sharp, Tom Williams, David de Winter, Simon Whitely, Siwan Rhys, George Barton, Joe Bates, RVW Trust, Hinrichsen Foundation, Marchus Trust, Wigmore Hall Endowment Fund, Matthew Shlomowitz, Lara Agar, Alex Paxton, Ábel Esbenshade, Adam Łukawski, Pedro Finisterra, Liam Elliot, Bob Allan, Brid Addison-Child, Caleb Sibley, Sarah McCabe, Vicky Tay and Yun Tay.

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*EXAUDI is grateful for the support of the Cockayne Foundation*

Linda Catlin Smith (b.1957)

## The Lighthouse *world première*

So fine was the morning  
except for a streak of wind  
here and there that the sea  
and sky looks all one fabric,  
as if sails were stuck high  
up in the sky, or the clouds  
had dropped down into the  
sea.

*Steer, hither steer your  
winged pines, all beaten  
Mariners (William Browne)*

A steamer far out at sea had  
drawn in the air a great  
scroll of smoke which  
stayed there curving and  
circling decoratively, as if  
the air were a fine gauze  
which held things and kept  
them softly in its mesh,  
only gently swaying them  
this way and that.

*But I beneath a rougher sea  
(William Cowper)*

And as happens sometimes  
when the weather is very  
fine, the cliffs looked as if  
they were conscious of the  
ships, and the ships looked  
as if they were conscious of  
the cliffs, as if they  
signalled to each other  
some message of their  
own.

*But I beneath a rougher sea  
Was whelmed in deeper gulfs  
than he (William Cowper)*

For sometimes quite close to  
the shore, the Lighthouse  
looked this morning in the  
haze an enormous  
distance away.

The text of 'The Lighthouse' is taken from Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, along with a few lines from William Browne and William Cowper, which appear in the novel.

Cassie Kinoshi (b.1993)

## dreams as vivid in my eyes as orchids ii *world première*

*Inspired by a Rainer Maria Rilke poem*

Dreams: as vivid in my eyes as orchids.  
Like them brilliant and opulent,  
like them drawing through the giant stem  
of living sap the juices of their strength,  
like them flaunting an absorbed life-blood,  
revelling in the fleetness of the minute,  
then, in the next, pallid as the dead.  
And when, softly, worlds pass overhead,  
do you not feel their winds, flower-scented?  
Dreams: as vivid in my eyes as orchids.

## Joe Bates

### Paroles Gelées *world première*

*François Rabelais's 'The Fourth Book of Pantagruel'*

Lors nous jeta sous le tillac pleins mains de paroles gelées, et semblaient dragée perlée de diverses couleurs.	Then we cast on the deck handfuls of frozen words, and they looked like sweet almonds of many colours.
---	--

Nous y vîmes des motz de gueule, de motz de sinople, des motz d'azur, des motz de sable, des motz dorés.	We saw red words, blue words, green words, black words, and gold words.
---	--

Lesquelles être quelque peu échaufées entre nos mains fondaient, comme neiges, et oyons reablement. Mais ne les entendions.	Which, heated between our hands, melted, like snow, and we could truly see them. But we did not understand them.
--	---

*Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.*

# Alex Tay

## money & yes

Gareth Matthey & Alex Tay

*Please note the following text includes explicit language and references to drug use and suicide.*

I wrote the book on happiness  
It made me happy for a time  
Now?  
Hypoxia  
Nitrous  
No oxide  
For me  
It's the best  
I promise

Deo

I wrote the book on happiness  
It made me rich for a time  
Now?  
Apoxia  
And monoxide  
All endorphin  
For me  
It's the fucking best  
I promise

Easy as breathing, easier breathing  
Worming through a crack in time  
From nothing to something  
That's me That's him  
Hard to choose, hard as choosing  
The charms of fracture all around  
No place is everyplace  
What place is my place  
No soil the same  
The loam, it slips and  
Hard hits my ground  
I'm falling:

Deo Gratias  
Deo Gratias  
It means something I swear, I hope  
I shout  
Deo Gratias  
To anyone who can hear

And all they say is...

Errr  
Uhhh  
Ahh  
Duhhh  
Ahhhh  
Uh...  
I I I I

I've lost the thread  
I've lost the verse  
It's all dead  
And in reverse...

...

No No.  
Stop wallow wallow wallowing  
Pick yourself up  
From that gilded ground  
You sick sick cricket  
Chirping and screeching  
No, not sick never sick  
It is impossible for me to be sick  
I am an  
Old young man who won't dare be old  
But needs needs needs needs needs needs  
Needs needs needs needs needs needs  
The opportunity of a life  
Just keep your shoes off the ground  
And your crystals cracked in hand  
Clasp the flame  
And I will see you  
I will fucking see you...

I'm in the mountains  
Igneous  
But the mountains are a garden  
Colorado Blue Aquilegia...  
Coerulea...  
And the garden is a river  
Radon green  
And the river is made of stones  
Do you hear the river turn over the palms of stones?  
Do you?  
It's playing in the other room  
Silent as a forfeit, as my cage it hums  
Calls forth to me  
Wondrous  
As the footsteps of ants  
That I have trained to hear  
And unfathomably, above it all, through it all – you  
You are still there  
And not here

Deo Gratias!! Deo Gratias!  
It means "I swear"  
It means "I promise"  
It means "I heard you the first time"  
I I I I

...

I dream *Sleep*  
I dream *Through the monitor stream*

A torrent of rain splits me  
apart asunder  
A gourd shell, twisted in  
two  
Fearing breath, fearing life *One lung, two lungs*

Velvet terrors score me            *No lungs,*  
deeply                                        *torn*

Rot rivulets through my cracks  
And yet!  
Rewards me richly  
In this Nirvana!!

I carved my scripture into flesh  
It made me holy for a time  
Now?  
My name is scrawled in salt slicked grit  
The toads pick Midas out my ribs  
and hack my skin to  
Countless howls of deaf confetti  
Wails of laughter clog my pipes of air  
Diamonds sting my eyes and scald my  
Throat, fire seals my purifying hands in prayer  
As I become the self-made man  
I am the self-made man!  
I'm your Siddartha!  
I have come  
And made a profit of you all!  
I crushed your piss-hardened kidney greed  
Into raw medicinal RNA  
To cure  
That burning miracle  
Millennium, when I'd be god you said  
I'd be the one you promised!  
I am the one you promised!  
I am the golden sun!  
I am the serotonin sediment!  
I am the crystalline eternal!  
I am the one I promise!!!

*Deo Gratias*

Hey  
Just calling to say  
I love you  
You're the fucking best  
I love you  
And I need you  
Don't leave me  
Please  
Forget about the rest  
I'd love it if you'd come here  
You can see the mountains from my window  
If you wake up early  
You can see the sun rise above them  
It will make you less lonely  
It will make you happy I promise  
I I I I...  
I promise not to say anything weird  
I promise not to do anything weird  
I promise  
But  
Admit it  
Don't you wish you...?  
You know?  
Don't you...?

...  
Please  
Call me