

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 23 September 2024
7.30pm

Vijay Iyer piano

Duncan Ward conductor

Manchester Collective

Eva Thorarinsdottir violin I, leader

Sara Wolstenholme violin I

Bridget O'Donnell violin I

Marie Schreer violin II

Ellie Consta violin II

William Newell violin II

Ruth Gibson viola

Carol Ella viola

James Morley cello

Nick Trygstad cello

Peggy Nolan cello

Billy Cole double bass

Beibei Wang percussion

Harry Percy percussion

Elsa Bradley percussion

Vijay Iyer (b.1971)

Ruth Gibson

Song for Flint for solo viola (2019)

Vijay Iyer

Kite (for Refaat) for solo piano from *What isn't hard to see* (2024)

Eva Thorarinsdottir • Ruth Gibson • James Morley • Vijay Iyer

The Law of Returns for piano quartet (2017)

Interval

Vijay Iyer

James Morley

Run for solo cello (2015)

Mutation I: Air for string quartet from *Mutations* (2005)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)

String Quartet in E minor (fragment) K417d

Vijay Iyer

Eva Thorarinsdottir • Marie Schreer • Ruth Gibson • James Morley

Mozart Effects for string quartet (2011)

Eva Thorarinsdottir (Leader) • Sara Wolstenholme • Bridget O'Donnell

Crisis Modes for strings and percussion (2019) *UK première*

Co-commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, Gustavo Dudamel, Music and Artistic Director; KölnMusik GmbH; and Wigmore Hall with the generous support of The Hargreaves and Ball Trust

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This concert, rescheduled from June 2020, was originally curated to close out my interrupted 2019-2020 year as Composer in Residence at Wigmore Hall. My prior offerings in that cycle placed collaboration and real-time creativity in the foreground, in three successive collaborative concerts with pianist Craig Taborn, poet Mike Ladd, vocalist Ganavya and others, and a joint lecture with musicologist Georgina Born. This final event in the series is a more traditional composer portrait, presenting some of my notated works for chamber ensembles and soloists.

Song for Flint for solo viola

This piece pays tribute to the people of Flint, Michigan, who have been subjected to a form of slow violence for a full decade: the ongoing contamination of their water supply, at one point including highly toxic amounts of lead. This is one of many instances in which corporations, municipalities and nation-states have inflicted and continue to inflict drastic harm on vulnerable populations, through war, pollution and the withholding of basic life needs. Jasbir Puar has called out this largely unchecked capacity of the powerful, which she critically labels 'the right to maim'.

Kite (for Refaat) version for solo piano

Kite is a nocturne from a duo suite titled *What isn't hard to see*. Working from different aspects of night, the notated material serves as thematic material and as a series of templates for real-time invention. This nocturne is dedicated to the late Refaat Alareer, whose best-known poem begins, 'If I must die, / you must live / to tell my story...!'

The Law of Returns for piano quartet

'There seems to be a consistent law that pervades human activity... It can be characterized in many ways, but I'll just say it's the law of returns... You breathe out and you breathe in – in fact, breathing is a very great example of that law. Inhale and exhale? Well that's the whole thing: it's pulsating... That law is consistent throughout all humanity'. Muhal Richard Abrams, interview with Vijay Iyer, 2012. This piece is dedicated to two beloved composer-pianists, Muhal Richard Abrams (1930-2017) and Geri Allen (1957-2017), who both played significant roles in my life. While it contains flashes of each of their musical languages, it is less a finished monument than a raw response to their deaths: an emotional remembrance, and a buoyant meditation on their influence as artists and mentors.

Run for solo cello

When Matt Haimovitz invited me to create an overture to Bach's Cello Suite No. 3 in C, I could not imagine doing justice to this iconic work. Eventually the suite offered some answers of its own. The instrument itself is already essentially 'in C', its open strings ringing out in that tonality, and I took note of Bach's use of the instrument's inherent resonances. I noticed how he would vault the listener through the music, using vibrant dance impulses to sustain a sometimes majestically slow harmonic rhythm. I soon

saw how this 'overture' could herald the whole suite without revealing much of it. This became a standalone piece, compact, active and continuous, like a brisk run through the woods.

Mutation I: Air

This is the opening movement for my first piano quintet, one of my earliest chamber works; since the piano is *tacet*, the movement can function as a brief self-contained work for string quartet. To my ear at the time, mutations – literally the noise in our genes – suggested a connection with music worth exploring. The 10 short movements (presented in full on my album *Mutations* (ECM, 2014)) alternate between incremental variations of rhythms, melodies or tones and more unclassifiable, even 'unmusical' gestures. This brief movement aligns tonally with the following work, so we present them *attacca*:

Mozart, String Quartet in E minor K417d (fragment) + Iyer, Mozart Effects for string quartet

This piece continues the theme of contemporary responses to works from the past – a frequent assignment for living composers. I was invited by the Brentano Quartet to participate in its *Fragments* series, in which modern music-makers responded to unfinished works by the 'great masters'. I was somehow the last composer on the invite list, so I got stuck with Mozart. The fragment I chose, K417d, is short, radically empty, and ends comically on the V7 of G major; my contribution picks up where his leaves off. To be tasked with 'finishing' an unfinished piece by Mozart is to serve as the punchline to a joke; as I was writing it, everyone I told about this piece burst out laughing. I felt compelled to turn my 'response' into a light, kaleidoscopic set piece.

Crisis Modes for strings and percussion

This piece, co-commissioned by Wigmore Hall, speaks from an uneasy place. As I wrote in my original programme note: '*Crisis Modes* offers a version of the present in which we call each other to action, push through a haze of denial, and organize ourselves as a coherent, constructive oppositional force'. Compositionally I was curious about some of the harmonic progressions that emerge in my piano playing, so the central movement orchestrates one of my intuitive solo *impromptus*. But then the first and third movements didn't hold up. After the première I decided to rewrite about 40% of the piece, retooling those outer movements. The revised piece, more urgent and truer to its title, debuted in New York in fall 2019. A recording was recently released on *Vijay Iyer: Trouble* (BMOP/Sound, 2024).

I'm grateful to the wonderful Manchester Collective for taking on this challenging set of material, and to Wigmore Hall for hosting me once again. It's become one of my favorite places to play and hear music. Thank you for listening.

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