

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 25 November 2023
3.00pm

This concert is supported by Cockayne Grants for the Arts, a donor advised fund at the London Community Foundation

COCKAYNE

Laurence Osborn Day

The Marian Consort

Rory McCleery artistic director
Caroline Halls soprano
Elspeth Piggott soprano
Alexandra Kidgell soprano
Eleanor Bray soprano
Sarah Anne Champion alto

Joy Sutcliffe alto
Rosie Parker alto
Ciara Hendrick alto
Will Wright tenor
Ed Woodhouse tenor
Ben Durrant tenor

Daniel Lewis tenor
Jon Stainsby bass
Christopher Webb bass
Tom Lowen bass
David Valsamidis bass

Laurence Osborn (b.1989)	(i) loop (after Weelkes) from <i>Spare Parts*</i> (2023)
Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623)	Death hath deprived me (1608)
Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953)	To an Unkind God from <i>3 Chants</i> (1930)
Laurence Osborn	(ii) crook (after Machaut) from <i>Spare Parts*</i>
Guillaume de Machaut (c.1300-1377)	Quant en moy
Thomas Weelkes	Whilst youthfull sports
Ruth Crawford Seeger	To an Angel from <i>3 Chants</i>
John Dowland (1563-1626)	His golden locks (1590)
Laurence Osborn	(iii) spring (after Dowland) from <i>Spare Parts*</i>
	Juvenilia (2018-9) <i>Look Who It Ain't • Konami Cheat/Selection Ritual • Pokémon Card I: Magikarp • Pig Machaut • Nightmare (Gently Dip) • Pokémon Card II: Metapod • Ballett dell' Avagavagavagava • There Was A Woman All Skin And Bone • Pokémon Card III: Mewtwo • Bye-Bye • Departure</i>

*world première, commissioned by The Marian Consort



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This programme returns to the idea of memory - real and imagined, cultural and personal. Across the first half are scattered the three movements of *Spare Parts* (2023), written with librettist Joseph Minden. Each is held together by a little bolt or screw borrowed from another piece of choral music. The first, *(i) loop (after Weelkes)*, is paired with Thomas Weelkes's *Death hath deprived me* (1608) written in remembrance of the composer Thomas Morley. The commemoration of the dead carries with it paradoxical implications of preservation and ruin, permanence and transience. In Weelkes's text, the body 'rests until the world shall end', while simultaneously disintegrating and turning to dust. *(i) loop* from *Spare Parts* uses this paradox as a starting point. The line, 'my dearest friend is dead and laid in grave', is set to repeat in a continuous loop. On each repetition, elements are removed from the text, allowing new meanings to be exposed. The music builds on traces left behind by Weelkes's counterpoint, decorating them in my own harmonies and textures.

Ruth Crawford-Seeger's extraordinary *3 Chants* (1930) seems to recall the past of an imaginary culture. It was originally planned as a setting of parts of the *Bhagavad Gita*, but, having been unable to find a reliable translation from the Sanskrit, Crawford-Seeger invented her own language out of syllables of dismembered English and German. The weirdness of the language combines with the austerity of Crawford-Seeger's vocal writing to stunning effect: the monolithic 'ng-ye ye-u/ e yet nah yu' of the opening strikes like a laser beam.

I hear the same otherworldly quality in 14th-century motets like **Guillaume de Machaut's** *Quant en moy*. Here, the strangeness emerges from the construction. The motet's lowest voice superimposes a snippet of existing plainchant (*color*) onto an repeating independent rhythmic pattern (*talea*). On top of this, the other two voices sing different texts simultaneously, creating an audible vortex of word and sound as three vocal strands swirl around one another. Medievalist Anna Zayarnaya has characterised these motets as chimeras - hybrid creatures comprised of different parts. This characterisation was the starting point for the second movement of *Spare Parts*, *(ii) crook (after Machaut)*. The motet is part-human, part-goat, part-bell. Its three texts relate to the experience librettist Joseph Minden and I have had - on entirely unrelated and separate occasions - of stumbling across large flocks of belled-up goats in the Cevennes mountains.

The second half of the programme moves towards more personal ideas of memory and 'past-ness'. The chirpy fa-la-la's of **Weelkes's** *Whilst youthfull sports* hide within them the sadness of the transience of youth. I hear a similar blend of naïvité and sadness in the childish humming that begins *To an Angel* from Ruth Crawford-Seeger's *3 Chants*. *To An Angel* is Crawford-Seeger's music at its most direct, a quality

about which she was profoundly ambivalent, her stance vacillating between 'an objective viewing of [the movement] as bad, impressionistic, and worthless, and a secret liking for its simplicity'. I find it to be one of the most tender and beautiful moments in all of 20th-century choral music.

John Dowland's 'His golden locks' (1590), written in honour of the retirement of Henry Lee, Champion to Queen Elizabeth I, is a reflection on aging and the passing of time. Initially attributed to George Peele, it is now thought to have been written by Lee himself in the first person, before being set by Dowland in the third person. Converting the text back to the first person - 'my golden locks time hath to silver turned' - gives the text a touching vulnerability, as it becomes a confession of waning strength. The corresponding movement of *Spare Parts*, *(iii) spring (after Dowland)*, is built around the line 'O time too swift! O swiftness never ceasing!'. In Joseph Minden's text, each word of the line appears in turn, embedded in a line lifted from a different text. To me, the poetry of the line is in the contradictory image of time as both finite and infinite. The music for this movement operates as if on a spring, boinging back and forth between these two conceptions of time, as the words and harmony from Dowland's song emerge and recede.

Juvenilia (2018-9) was written as part of a clutch of pieces in which I was trying to reach back and access a childhood that felt lost and distant. *Juvenilia* actively *speaks* in the codes and languages that children use: I took care not to use texts written by adults *for* children, instead relying on texts that children themselves create or disseminate. It owes much to Peter and Iona Opie's wonderful ethnographic study of 50s and 60s playground rituals *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. These texts are combined with texts from my own (1990s) childhood, including the chants 'Ip Dip Doo' and 'Nobody Likes Me', the made-up languages Pig Latin and Uvaguv, computer cheat codes, and Pokémon trading cards.

The movement *Nightmare (Gently Dip)* sets the song sung by a severed head in George Peele's 1595 play *The Old Wives' Tale*. It refers musically to a recurring nightmare I had as a child, which would involve disembodied voices singing nonsense songs very close to my ears. The music 'grows up' during the second half of the piece, the playful anthology of the first half giving way to a darker, more continuous second half. This is reflected in the progression of *Pokémon Card* movements, the middle of which is literally a chrysalis. A lot of grief trickled in as I was writing this piece. It emerges in the final two movements, *Bye-Bye* and *Departure* which combines the Alleluia for the Holy Innocents from the *Liber Usualis* and Arthur Rimbaud's *Départ*.

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Laurence Osborn (b.1989)

(i) loop (after Weelkes) from *Spare Parts* (2023)

Joseph Minden, after Anonymous

My rest friend
My ear straining
My insidious
a friend
y ears rise
a friend
a friend
d friend
M e
rest r a i n
M e
retrieved
M e

My dearest friend is dead and laid in grave

Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623)

Death hath deprived me (1608)

Anonymous

Death hath deprived me of my dearest friend,
My dearest friend is dead and laid in grave,
In grave he rests until the world shall end
As end must all things have.
All things must have an end that Nature wrought,
Must unto dust be brought.

Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953)

To an Unkind God from *3 Chants* (1930)

Laurence Osborn

(ii) crook (after Machaut) from *Spare Parts*

Joseph Minden

1

We fell off
into a high and tranquil valley.

Hearing this, we
turned the music off
to listen properly.

We fell off
into a high and tranquil valley.

2

The trough
stills our euphony.

Across the hills, we
walk our tongues. The trough
falls still and glassy.

The trough
stills our euphony.

3

Clong.

Mäh.

We are a curtain of mouths.

Guillaume de Machaut (c.1300-1377)

Quant en moy

Guillaume de Machaut

triplum

Quant en moy vint
premierement
Amours, si tres
doucettement
Me vost mon cuer
enamourer,
Que d'un regart me fist
present,
Et tres amoureux
sentement
Me donna avec Dous Penser:
Espoir
D'avoir
Mercy sans
refuser,
Mais onques en tout mon
vivant
Hardement ne me volt
donner;

Et si me fait en
desirant
Penser si
amouusement,
Que par force de
desirer
Ma joie convient en tourment
Muer, se je n'ay hardement.
Las! et je n'en puis recouvrer,
Qu'Amours
Secours
Ne me vuet nul
prester,
Qui en ses las si
durement
Me tient que n'en puis
eschaper;

Ne je ne vueil, qu'en
atendant
Sa grace, je vueil
humblement
Toutes ces dolours endurer;
Et s'Amours loyal le consent
Que ma douce dame au
corps gent
Me vueille son ami
clamer,
Je sai
De vray
Que arai, sans
finer,
Joie qu'Amours a fin
amant

When Love entered

triplum

When Love entered my
heart
that first time, She so very
sweetly
wished to make my heart
fall in love,
that She sent a look my
way,
and gave me feelings of
deep love,
with Sweet Thought:
Hope
that I'd receive
mercy without being
refused,
but never as long as I've
lived
has She ever intended to
embolden me;

And so She makes me in
my desiring
have thoughts so filled
with love,
that by the strength of
desiring
my joy must change to
torment,
if I do not possess courage.
Alas! and I cannot find any,
because Love
has no intention
of providing me with any
help,
as She keeps me so
tightly in her nets
that I cannot escape
them;

Nor do I want to, since as I
await
her mercy, my humble
wish is
to endure all these pains;
and if faithful Love consents
that my sweet lady with
her noble appearance
might wish to call me her
friend,
I know
it as the truth
that I shall, endlessly,
possess
the joy that Love owes a
perfect lover

Doit pour ses maus
guerredonner;

as a reward for his
ills;

Mais elle atent trop
longuement,
Et j'aime si foiblement
Que je n'ose mercy
rouver,
Car j'aim miex vivre en
esperant
D'avoir mercy prochainement,
Que Refus me veingne
tuer,
Et pour ce di en soupirant:
Grant folie est de tant
amer
Que de son dous face on
amer.

motetus

Amour et biauté parfaite
Doubter,
Celer
Me font parfaitement,

Et vrais Desirs, qui
m'afaite
De vous,
Cuers dous,
Amer sans finement;

Et quant j'aim si finement,
Merci
Vous pri,
Car elle me soit
faite

Sans vostre honnour
amenrir,
Car j'aim miex einsi
languir
Et morir, s'il vous
agree,
Que par moy fust empiree
Vostre honnour, que tant
desir,
Ne de fait ne de pensee.

tenor

Amara valde.

But she waits too
long,
and I love so foolishly
that I do not dare beg for
mercy,
for I prefer living in the
hope
of soon receiving mercy,
rather than Refusal
coming to finish me off,
and so I say with a sigh:
It is great folly to love so
much
that you make your
sweetness bitter.

motetus

Love and perfect beauty
make me doubt
and dissemble
perfectly,

As does true Desire, who
inspires me
to love you,
sweetheart,
with endless love;

And since I love so purely
I beg mercy
from you,
if only it might be granted
me

Without diminishing your
honour,
for I'd prefer this kind of
languishing
and dying as well, should
it please you,
to harming in any way
your honour, which I so
highly esteem,
either by deed or thought.

tenor

Very bitter.

Thomas Weelkes

Whilst youthfull sports

Thomas Weelkes

Whilst youthful sports are lasting,
To feasting turn our fasting.

Fa la la.

With revels and with wassails,
Make grief and care our vassals.

Fa la la.

For youth it well beseemeth,
That pleasure he esteemeth.

Fa la la.

And sullen age is hated,
That mirth would have abated.

Fa la la.

Ruth Crawford Seeger

To an Angel from *3 Chants* (1930)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

His golden locks (1590)

Henry Lee

His golden locks Time hath to silver turned.
O Time too swift! Oh swiftness never ceasing!
His youth 'gainst Time and Age hath ever spurned,
But spurned in vain; youth waneth by increasing.
Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen;
Duty, faith, love are roots and ever green.

His helmet now shall make a hive for bees,
And lover's sonnets turn to holy psalms.
A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees,
And feed on prayers which are Age's alms.
But though from Court to cottage he depart,
His Saint is sure of his unspotted heart.

And when he saddest sits in homely cell,
He'll teach his swains this carol for a song:
Blest be the hearts that wish my Sovereign well.
Curst be the soul that think her any wrong.
Goddess, allow this aged man his right
To be your bedesman now that was your knight.

Laurence Osborn

(iii) spring (after Dowland) from *Spare Parts*

Joseph Minden

O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall
his time: as the fishes that are taken
nod, speak too. If charnel houses and our graves
mind That now swift slides from my enchanting
and let me in. Oh, who is this
Pe secunde blys after es swyftnes, Pat ilk
I am free. Love will never, never conquer
and I came away. Thank God, the ceasing
O time too swift! Oh swiftness never ceasing!

Juvenilia (2018-9)

Look Who It Ain't

Konami Cheat/Selection Ritual

Pokémon Card I: Magikarp

Pig Machaut

Nightmare (Gently Dip)

Pokémon Card II: Metapod

Ballett dell' Avagavagavagava

There Was A Woman All Skin And Bone

Pokémon Card III: Mewtwo

Bye-Bye

Departure