

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 25 October 2024
1.00pm

London Central Brass

James Nash trumpet
Holly Clark trumpet
Beatriz Vila french horn
Rhydian Tiddy trombone
James Tavares tuba

Gwyneth Walker (b.1947)

Raise the Roof! (1987)

Carlo Gesualdo (c.1561-1613)

T'amo mia vita (pub. 1609) *arranged by Urban Agnas*

Dolcissima mia vita (by 1611) *arranged by Urban Agnas*

Tu m'uccidi, o crudele (pub. 1611) *arranged by Urban Agnas*

Declan Molloy (b.2000)

Dreaming Spires (2024) *(world première)*

Eric Whitacre (b.1970)

October (2000) *arranged by James Tavares*

Elliot Teo (b.1997)

Petals in the Sun (2021)

Luciano Berio (1925-2003)

Call (1985, rev. 1987)

Jan Bach (1937-2020)

Foliations (1995)

Joakim Agnas (b.1969)

Tango (2019)



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Gwyneth Walker's dynamic *Raise the Roof!* was commissioned by the Chandler Cultural Foundation, Randolph, Vermont in 1987 to celebrate the restoration of Chandler Hall, a community concert hall and theatre. Much local pride and effort was given to providing the Randolph residents with this performance space, and the spirit was that of American 'barn raisings'. Thus, *Raise the Roof!* was inspired by the energy of the community renovation activity. The hand and foot tappings are derived from the rhythms of hammers pounding and carpenters at work.

Carlo Gesualdo was an Italian nobleman and composer, known for his highly expressive compositional style. He was considered highly avant-garde during his lifetime, and his music was not widely imitated by his contemporaries. However, in later periods, his work has been admired for its innovation, particularly by 20th-century composers such as Igor Stravinsky. This collection of madrigals, arranged by **Urban Agnas** of the renowned Stockholm Chamber Brass, showcases Gesualdo's more extreme experiments with harmonic progression, cross-relation and rhythmic contrast.

T'amo mia vita ('I love you, my life'): this text speaks of intense love, with an almost obsessive devotion, aligning with Gesualdo's emotional and turbulent life – notably, his infamous murder of his wife and her lover.

Dolcissima mia vita ('My sweetest life'): here the text reflects a more intimate and affectionate sentiment. In Gesualdo's hands the simple sentiment becomes charged with emotional complexity and tension.

Tu m'uccidi, o crudele ('You kill me, oh cruel one'): this work stands as one of his most emotionally intense madrigals, vividly expressing the pain of unrequited love through its avant-garde harmonic experimentation and dissonances.

Declan Molloy is an accomplished freelance composer, and alumnus of Oxford University and the Royal Academy of Music. We are extremely fortunate to have worked closely with Declan over the last several months developing a brand new piece, *Dreaming Spires*, of which this concert is the world première. The title *Dreaming Spires* refers to poet Matthew Arnold's description of the towering architecture of Oxford. The piece thereby echoes the composer's strong affinity and connection with the city, particularly its iconic landmark the Sheldonian Theatre. Designed by Christopher Wren, this is a building with a rich history: it was originally built as a venue for university parties, then went on to become the home of the University Press, decorated by Robert Streater's famous ceiling painting. Now used as the ceremonial hall of Oxford University, the theatre represents many things, including progress, truth and contrast between the sciences and the arts. Painting a music picture of the Sheldonian Theatre naturally lends itself to the brass quintet ensemble, due to the auditorium's golden ornamentation of biblical fanfare players at the top of its organ. How the ensemble is written for also reflects the character and history of the landmark, and the fact that it is both a beacon of celebration and a

cabinet of curiosities. The piece undergoes various phases of becoming more and more sophisticated, combining fragmentary motifs derived from church bell towers and allowing them to evolve into more colourful and grandiose sound worlds.

Eric Whitacre was commissioned to write *October* by his friend Brian Anderson, a high school band director from Nebraska, for a consortium of 30 Nebraskan high school wind bands. Thus the work couldn't be too complex or virtuosic, and demanded a simple, elegant and functional composition that, in his own words, never compromised its musical integrity. He writes, 'October is my favourite month. Something about the crisp autumn air and the subtle change in light always makes me a little sentimental, and as I started to sketch I felt that same quiet beauty in the writing. The simple, pastoral melodies and subsequent harmonies are inspired by the great English Romantics (Vaughan Williams, Elgar) as I felt that this style was also perfectly suited to capture the natural and pastoral soul of the season.' This arrangement was completed by our own **James Tavares**, which of course brings its own challenge: that of recreating the myriad of colours and textures available to a wind band with only five brass instruments.

Written for W1 Brass, *Petals in the Sun* by **Elliot Teo** is a red-hot musical recreation of Hernando Ruiz Ocampo's painting of the same name. It features lush tropical orange and yellow hues that light up the work, carefully balanced by dark forms; the petals as the artist painted them gladly give salutations to the vibrant sun. Teo utilises the light and shade of each instrument with technical mastery, almost synesthetically recreating the bold palate and angular forms in Ocampo's own work.

Berio was an Italian composer noted for his experimental approach and his pioneering work in electronic music. His work for brass quintet calls for all five members to stand in a line, at least two metres from each other. The piece features each instrument in a unique way, utilising many extended techniques. As a result, each instrument has a distinct colour within the work. Although not explicitly stated by the composer, we like to think of the tuba and trombone as a dark blue and green, a regal purple for the horn and vibrant pink and yellows for the trumpets.

Foliations by American composer **Jan Bach** is a set of variations on *La Folia*, a theme famously used by composers such as Handel and Clementi. Their choice and order are to be determined by the players. Alongside a narration, written and performed by our own James Nash, our rendition features each instrument in the ensemble, as a 'Young Person's Guide to the Quintet.'

Finally, **Joakim Agnas's** *Tango* is an almost grotesque reworking of the traditional Argentinian dance. Featuring stark harmonies and undulating time signatures, Agnas's work combines the passionate intensity of the tango with almost Stravinskian devices.

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