

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 27 February 2024  
7.30pm

## Colin Currie Quartet

Colin Currie percussion  
Owen Gunnell percussion  
Adrian Spillett percussion  
Sam Walton percussion

Andy Akiho (b.1979)	Pillar I from <i>Seven Pillars</i> (2014-2021)
Dave Maric (b.1970)	Nascent Forms (2019)
Freya Waley-Cohen (b.1989)	Stone Fruit (2023) <i>world première</i> Co-commissioned by Wigmore Hall
	<i>Interval</i>
Steve Reich (b.1936)	Mallet Quartet (2009) <i>I. Fast • II. Slow • III. Fast</i>
Amy Beth Kirsten (b.1972)	may the devil take me (2019) <i>UK première</i>
Andy Akiho	Pillar IV from <i>Seven Pillars</i>

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ENGLAND**



This concert features music by British and American composers for percussion quartet. Both of these territories have seen a huge development for the repertoire in recent years, and tonight's programme includes two works written for Colin Currie Quartet (including a world première) and works written for two flagship American quartets - Sō and Sandbox Percussion.

**Andy Akiho** announces the start of his epic *Seven Pillars* with a two-note jolt to the system. What will follow, in the complete version, is nearly 90 minutes of music. The essential DNA of the entire cycle can be found in this ingenious opening movement, or 'Pillar'. Akiho's grasp of the grittier side of the percussion palette and creation of marvellous, dovetailing contrapuntal mechanisms is just one hallmark of his incredibly gripping style.

*Pillar I* uses just a few sounds for the quartet, and his concept of sharing larger pieces of equipment (such as the Gran Cassa and Brake Drum) further establishes the beautifully close-knit chamber style of performing required. The players are very much in each other's pockets in this piece, bursting into unison fanfares here and splitting off into a duet-groove there. The concluding, relentless groove in 13/8 time is a thing of great poise and brilliance - the receding resonance leaving an air of expectation and exhilaration.

I first met **Dave Maric** in The Steve Martland Band in the 1990s and from that electrifying start we became close friends and musical collaborators. More than ten world premières and an entire album of music (*Borrowed Time* on ONYX Classics) have been amongst the results, with *Nascent Forms* coming to life more recently.

Tasked with writing for the now somewhat well-established classic 'mallet quartet' of two marimbas and two vibraphones, Maric sought to harness the gentler and warmer side of this combination before letting the musicians finally let go and raise the roof in a dance-like finale. As well as often using soft mallets and the very low registers of the marimbas, double bass bows are used by all four musicians, releasing a strange, sustained singing quality into the musical air. A spacious and poignant work that allows the percussion keyboards to merge into a single, organ-like entity.

The next work draws, to an affectionate extent, on some of the earliest chamber music written for percussion: that of the great American iconoclast John Cage. If he did indeed tell us that 'Percussion Music is revolution' then that movement began, at least partially, in the kitchen. His sound world of tin cans, utensils and fabulous 'prepared' sounds would have a profound impact on the timbral choices used in new music, and they can be heard, with contemporary spice, once again today in **Freya Waley-Cohen's** *Stone Fruit*.

Much of the music is for Teacups and Saucers (note capitals!). Yet there is a vulnerability to proceedings. Such delicate sounds, and wielded with such kinetic intent! What, like the stone fruit, lies underneath the soft and attractive exterior? Will we bite into something more

rigid and less palatable? Or will the charming sheen endure and keep the listener safe? This ingenious piece teases and tempts, and looks back as well as forwards in time.

CCQ enjoys the closest of ties - and much history now - with **Steve Reich**. The four of us are founder members of The Colin Currie Group, my ensemble which specialises in the music of Reich, and his canon of work is the braid that holds much of our programming together. We approach *Mallet Quartet* as nothing less than a symphony in three movements for vibraphones and marimbas. The first movement is expansive and broad, with the two lead vibraphones happily battling it out in canon over a backdrop of the most splendid marimbas. Finally finding a unison pattern to agree on, the music lands with a swagger in the unexpectedly gentle and refined territory of the second movement. Gamelan hues, melodies in clusters and trademark warm harmonies all shine sweetly here. The finale nods to the first movement, but the mood is lighter, more syncopated. Cycling around the keys, the composer eventually brings all the players together to the upper registers of their instruments for a 'risoluto' cut-off.

With a quote from Cervantes's iconic *Don Quixote* to establish the musical vantage point, **Amy Beth Kirsten's** piece pushes sounds/instruments in directions contrary to their core. The humble triangle is usually associated with a modest 'ding' or two from the back of an orchestra, but here we have four of the same down at the front of the stage. If that wasn't contrary enough, much of their tone is now muted - their cliché resonance largely thwarted. And then there's the matter of the striking materials - stone, glass, ceramic, a teaspoon (left over from Freya's utensil cupboard perhaps?)... Which one will leave the greatest impression in this amiable game of jostling personalities?

The first of Akiho's *Seven Pillars* to be composed, and the longest in duration, *Pillar IV* is the central and most solid movement in this collection. With an incredibly refined rhythmic language, this music also stretches each player in terms of physical stamina, pin-point accuracy required, dexterity and coordination. The set-up is fantastically contained, with just a handful of sounds shared between all four players. Three of the musicians share a vibraphone and glockenspiel for pitched material, with the fourth holding out on their own behind a set of suspended pipes of indefinite pitch.

Conjuring up matter swirling and coalescing, the musicians eventually find themselves locked in to an identical 16th note pulse, only to have the switch flicked, one at a time, to make that value double itself, leading to a ferocious unison conclusion at 32nd note warp speed.

Akiho has gifted the world a monolithic musical legacy with his *Pillars*, and the quartet aims to gradually absorb the entire cycle in the years ahead.

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