

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 27 June 2026
11.30am

The African Concert Series Mandela Tales

This series is supported by Cockayne Grants for the Arts,
a Donor Advised Fund, held at The Prism Charitable Trust

Shirley J Thompson director, violin
Abigail Kelly storyteller, soprano
Rowland Sutherland flute
Aaliyah Booker violin
Melissa Morris piano
Moussa Dembele percussion

Shirley J Thompson (b.1958)

Mandela Tales (2011-2)

Scene 1 – Nkosi Sikelele (God Bless Africa)

Scene 2 – Mpipidi and the Motlopi Tree

Scene 3 – The Hare and the Spirit Tree

Scene 4 – Harebrained Shenanigans

Scene 5 – Festito Goes to Market

Scene 6 – Precious Skies



UNDER 35S

Supported by the AKO Foundation
Media partner Classic FM



Join & Support
Donations



125 years
Mark the moment
Support the music



To find out more visit
wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities – full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a loop to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

The African Concert Series in conjunction with Shirley J Thompson Music & Production presents:

Mandela Tales

for singer/storyteller, ensemble & animation

based on Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela's *Favourite African Folktales*

Mandela Tales for singer/storyteller, instrumental soloists and animation is a beautiful production for all ages, devised, directed and produced by award-winning composer and artistic director, Shirley J Thompson.

Inspired by Nelson Mandela's book *Favourite African Folk Tales*, and encapsulating the sheer magic of storytelling, imagination and creativity, *Mandela Tales* comprises several compelling traditional African folktales chosen from across the 54 countries of the African continent. Thompson enhances the fantastical experience of these timeless legends using the power of music, visuals and storytelling. *Mandela Tales* is performed by a host of guest artistes under special arrangement.

Shirley J Thompson has a long-held fascination with South Africa, its cultures and musics, that was inspired by having two wonderful adopted Aunts, who treated her like a daughter when she was a student studying at Liverpool University and 250 miles from her own dear mother, father and family in London. Thompson could only travel home for short stints three times a year, so the warmth and care readily offered by South African Aunts made a profound impact on the 18-year-old university student. As part of the Pan African movement at the University and the city of Liverpool, Thompson joined the frequent public protests for 'Free Azania!', the popular slogan of protest at the time. The 1976 Soweto Uprising featured in today's concert was frequently and fervidly discussed in her circles as the most heinous of atrocities.

As a music student, Thompson enjoyed listening and dancing to the music of South Africa as well as that of several African cultures, in addition to her study of music on the University of Liverpool BA in Musicology (Honours) course that only featured composers of European heritage. While she did not have access to historical South African composers, she became familiar with contemporary musicians such as Miriam Makeba, Abdullah Ibrahim, Hugh Masakela, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Township music. She was most infatuated with the traditional choral and dance traditions of South African communities and took the opportunity to attend the month-long prestigious National Arts Festival in Eastern Cape in 2008, where she experienced a transformative feast of music and dance from creatives and performers that gathered from every corner of South Africa to perform and

discuss music and the arts. The first event she attended was an insightful symposium on African Pianism. Thompson presented her reflection on this defining festival experience in a BBC Radio 3 radio documentary entitled *The Free-Thinking Festival*. Thompson's presentation, named *Singing and Dancing for a Cohesive Society*, is a reflection on a performance given at the Festival by an entire village, performing a production on stage, which included a babe-in-arms and a great grandmother. The village must have been rehearsing the production for some time as it was an incredibly moving experience that left an indelible impression on the composer. It evidenced the power of music and dance to create cohesive communities.

In 2011 Thompson was approached by the South African writer and entrepreneur Rachel Holmes, who was Head of Literature at the South Bank Centre and commissioned Thompson to create a stage production for the Children's Literature Festival in 2012. Having created several operatic and large-scale stage works by this time, Thompson was eager to use her innate ability and experience to integrate music, dance and visual arts in this new commission. Always a huge fan of The Very Honourable Madiba, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, she decided to call on his legacy for inspiration. Although she considered his autobiography, *A Long Walk to Freedom*, further research led her to Mandela's *Favourite African Folktales*, and she was immediately entranced by them.

The mystical stories chosen for *Mandela Tales* include: Mpipidi and the Motlopi Tree (Botswana) – Mpipidi longs for a baby sister; The Hare and the Spirit Tree (Xhosa, South Africa) – A beautiful daughter is struck dumb by a wicked spell; and Fesito Goes to Market (Uganda) – Fesito discovers the power of kindness. There were many more folktales from which to choose in the collection. In *Mandela Tales*, Thompson masterfully interweaves instrumental textures with the spoken word, song and animation to create a joyful, entertaining and magical show. These mystical stories are performed by the highly versatile leading opera singer and storyteller, Abigail Kelly. Other renowned solo instrumentalists include Rowland Sutherland (flute), Aaliyah Booker (violin), Melissa Morris (piano) and Moussa Dembele (drums and percussion).

We hope you enjoy the show!

Many thanks to: The Almighty; Mrs Hyacinth Sinclair Thompson, Mr Samuel A. Thompson; Mia Carrington; Wigmore Hall; BBC Radio 3 In Tune, BBC Radio London David and Carrie Grant; Dr Rebeca Omordia; the African Concert Series; the University of Westminster; Mr Robert Matthew Walker, Ms Rachel Holmes, Ms Ann Grant.

Shirley J Thompson (b.1958)

Mandela Tales (2011-2)

Scene 1 – Nkosi Sikelele (God Bless Africa)

Nkosi sikelel' Afrika
Maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo
Yizwa imithandazo yethu
Nkosi sikelela thina lusapho lwayo
Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso
O fedise dintwa le matshwenyeho
O se boloke (Ntate) o se boloke setjhaba sa heso
Setjhaba sa South Afrika (South Afrika)

Scene 2 – Mpipidi and the Motlopi Tree

Scene 3 – The Hare and the Spirit Tree

Scene 4 – Harebrained Shenanigans

Scene 5 – Festito Goes to Market

Scene 6 – Precious Skies

Shirley J Thompson

Underneath these skies so precious,
We together, make our journey
Over hills and gentle waters,
We find troubles,
And we all find joy.

Underneath these skies so pleasant,
We are one with all around us,
We are blessed beyond all measure,
We are loved today, and always.

Underneath these skies so precious,
We together, make our journey
Over hills and gentle waters,
We find troubles,
And we all find joy.

Underneath these skies so pleasant,
We are one with all around us,
We are blessed beyond all measure,
We are loved today, and always.