

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 28 June 2024
7.00pm

Sean Shibe guitar

GBSR Duo

George Barton percussion
Siwan Rhys piano

12 Ensemble

Eloisa-Fleur Thom violin I
Zahra Benyounes violin I
Ellie Consta violin I
William Newell violin I

Alessandro Ruisi violin II
Oliver Cave violin II
Asia Jiménez Antón de Vez violin II
Luba Tunnicliffe viola

Matthew Maguire viola
Max Ruisi cello
Sergio Serra cello
Gabriel Abad Varela bass

Catharina Pratten (c.1824-1895)

Sadness
A lost love
A Lament

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Ramifications (1968-9)

Harold Budd (1936-2020) & Brian Eno (b.1948)

The Plateaux of Mirror (1979) *arranged by George Barton*

John White (1936-2024)

Drinking and Hooting Machine (?1968)

Interval

Oliver Leith (b.1990)

Doom and the Dooms for electric guitar (solo),
keyboard, percussion and string ensemble (2024)
world première Commissioned by Wigmore Hall
*All I ever wanted • Javelin shearwater •
Untitled • Lug • The Abider • My Horse
Named Dream • Donjon Droll • Old times
away • The Winch*

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Various instruments of the lute family have had periods of popularity in British history, but it was only in the 19th Century that the classical guitar, in a form that we would recognise today, gained a significant presence on these shores. Among various English guitar tutorials published during this time, we find the name of one Madame Sidney **Pratten**. Born **Catharina Pelzer**, she was the daughter of a German guitarist, and wife of the English flautist Robert Sidney Pratten.

Pratten's family moved to England when she was a child, and she took up her father's instrument from an early age and went on tour with him. She later set up her own guitar school, and became a leading proponent of the instrument as performer and composer. That her pupils included Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Louise is surely a sign of the esteem in which she was held, and also the respectability of the guitar in English high society. Pratten penned around 250 works, and tonight we'll hear three works: *Sadness*, *A lost love* and *A Lament*.

György Ligeti's *Ramifications* for strings was completed in 1969, at a time when he was exploring the possibilities of composing outside of standard equal temperament, in works such as the *Requiem* and second string quartet. Of the twelve strings in this score, half are tuned to a quarter-tone above standard tuning, resulting in what he called a 'hyperchromatic' harmony – a deliberate smudging of pitch, which he likened to a sense of decay.

In addition to this, Ligeti conceived the structure of the work as a 'net-formation', in which the string parts are alternatively rent apart and bunched together. Starting with a complex rhythmic mesh around a narrow pitch range, we hear rapid figurations that gradually widen in space, before contracting into icy high-pitched stillness. As ever with his music, the results are strange but compelling.

In the 1970s, the American pianist and minimalist composer **Harold Budd** was making a living teaching in California when a phone call from England changed his life. On the line was **Brian Eno**, who had heard a piece of his music, and invited him to London. Budd didn't hesitate, and in 1978 an album of Budd's compositions, *The Pavilion of Dreams*, was produced by Eno and released on his *Obscure* label.

That same year Eno released *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, a record which had a defining role in the concept of 'ambient music'. As he described it, 'ambient music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting'. Eno and Budd then collaborated for the follow-up album *Ambient 2: The Plateaux of Mirror*.

Eno said that he liked Budd's approach of 'starting with a very small set of possibilities and then improvising around them'. The result was ten tracks of mellow, piano-

led music, in which Budd played a piano that was electronically treated with added studio effects. We'll hear an arrangement of the title track for keyboards, strings, percussion and electric guitar, made by **George Barton** of *GBSR Duo*.

Around the same time that Eno was collaborating with Budd, he also produced and issued *Machine Music*, an album by **John White** and Gavin Bryars. White, who died earlier this year aged 87, had a varied career that spanned conventional and experimental forms of music making. His piece *Drinking and Hooting Machine* appeared on the aforementioned album, and very much belongs to the latter category.

The piece is designed for four groups of performers with up to five sub-groups, each of which are to blow on bottles filled with 'a favoured drink'. The instructions – handwritten in pen over several sheets of manuscript paper – direct the groups of players to 'hoot' the bottle a number of times, and at various points to either 'sip', 'swig' or 'gulp' from them. 'It is in keeping with the character of the piece', White writes, 'to deliberately avoid "keeping time" among the hoots once the performers have started'. The outcome, as you might guess, is a gradual lowering of pitch, like a sleepy parliament of owls.

Guitar was the first instrument that **Oliver Leith** learned, and although he no longer plays, it remains a 'culturally loaded' instrument for him, particularly in its electric form. This fascination will be no surprise to those who saw his 2022 opera *Last Days* at the *Linbury Theatre*, based on a fictionalised account of the death of Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain. 'Running from where the guitar sits in my mind is futile', Leith says, and for his new work *Doom and the Dooms* he has taken up a fictional conceit in order to compose 'for band rather than ensemble'.

The title refers to an imaginary defunct group of the same name, who were once part of a nascent music scene that never quite took off. The composition is an attempted recreation of their set list, 'compiled from bootlegs, footage and hearsay'. So what you'll hear tonight is not the band itself, but 'an archaeological dig and presentation of bones'. Some information is missing, some attributions are speculative.

There are familiar elements of the rock guitar sound-world: distortion and chorus pedals, strummed chords, florid runs, wild pitch-bending. But there is no singer – instead, strings and keyboard fill out the sound, joined by an impressive array of percussion. With broken ceramics, tuned bottles and bullet cartridges augmenting the arsenal, Leith provides us with alternative history of what guitar music might have been.

What became of *Doom and the Dooms*? As Leith puts it, they were indeed doomed, swept away by the vagaries of shifting tastes. 'People preferred lyrics and more beautiful people, which is fair.'

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