

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 28 June 2025  
1.00pm

Supported by The Radcliffe Trust

## Wigmore Hall Voices of Today: Alex Paxton

### Ensemble Modern

Vimbayi Kaziboni conductor	Ueli Wiget piano
Dietmar Wiesner flute	Hermann Kretzschmar piano
Christian Hommel oboe	Rainer Römer percussion
Jaan Bossier clarinet	Jagdish Mistry violin
Lutz Koppetsch saxophone	Giorgos Panagiotidis violin
Johannes Schwarz bassoon	Megumi Kasakawa viola
Thomas Mittler horn	Annie Jacobs-Perkins cello
Sava Stoianov trumpet	Paul Cannon double bass

Bertram Wee (b.1992)

My Body, Broken For Your Amusement (Vessels II) (2022)

Tansy Davies (b.1973)

neon (2004)

Anna Meredith (b.1978)

Tripotage Miniatures (2016)

*I. Lanolin • II. 40 Watt • III. Moth •  
IV. Buzzard • V. Scrying • VI. Majolica*

Anthony Braxton (b.1945)

Composition No. 136 (1987)

Alex Paxton (b.1990)

Don't Leave Me Behind (2025) *world première*

Co-commissioned by Wigmore Hall (with the generous support of the Marchus Trust and the Wigmore Hall Endowment Fund), Ensemble Modern, Philharmonie Essen and Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ Amsterdam (with support from Ammodo)



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'As the world becomes a total information pool, and therefore simultaneous, the natural tendency is for all the older patterns and barriers and structures to be swept aside.' That was Marshall McLuhan's prophetic insight, back in 1966. Today, palpably, we are all swirling within the flux of an electronically generated vortex, saturated with data. Rapidly accelerating technological change and innovation define our historical moment. Digital media are reconfiguring even our basic perceptions of time and space. McLuhan foresaw that artists may have a crucial role to play, helping us, collectively, to adjust our sensory lives and adapt to this potentially bewildering world of simultaneous multiplicities.

Alex Paxton is a composer who is audibly at home within this volatile environment, an artist well-equipped to negotiate its challenges, and to grasp the creative possibilities it offers. At the same time, he is an irrepressible celebrant of the senses, those responsive interfaces with the world that bring our bodies to life. Paxton approaches composition as a mode of imaginative projection, akin to the worldbuilding activities involved in video games or speculative fiction. But he also wants the experience of hearing his music to be like biting into a strawberry. In addition to providing a new piece for performance at this concert, Paxton has devised the overall programme, in consultation with the members of Ensemble Modern, selecting works by contemporaries who, in their own ways, respond constructively, and with zest, to a cultural situation where many inherited hierarchies have been levelled, and conventional boundaries are frequently crossed, or erased altogether.

**Bertram Wee** is a technologically-savvy composer, who sets out to write 'music that prioritizes being'. What that might entail is made dramatically clear by *Vessels II*, where an electronic device called a talkbox channels a torrent of violent noise, through a plastic hose, into the mouth of a musician playing MIDI keyboard. Initially, the audience hears only what filters through the keyboard player's flesh. As the piece develops, the performer not only absorbs, but also projects an amplified stream of sonic turbulence into the surrounding auditorium. From the outset listeners become participants too, as they enter into this concentrated and intensely physical auditory experience.

**Tansy Davies** has received acclaim for her operas and large-scale works for orchestra. Even in those ostensibly traditional contexts, the circuitry that animates her distinctive musical imagination derives active components from the broad scope of her musical interests. With its quirky cyclical construction, *neon* chugs onward, percussively emphatic, packed with punchy gestures, yet never quite predictable in its flurries of lurching motion. Davies opens up an articulated space, where the slippery looping impetus of electronic dance music seems to collude with tonal shifts and bold coloration drawn from modern chamber music, or from the more exploratory reaches of rock. As those agitated, elliptical rhythms circulate through this composition's tangy mix of instrumental voices, they conjure up a strong impression of physical movement, artfully choreographed and lit.

**Anna Meredith** has written string quartets, recorded electronic pop albums, and scored atmospheric film soundtracks. She has composed ambitious music for performance at the Proms, and served as the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's Composer in Residence. She also leads her own band, playing live in clubs and dance venues. Flexibility and resourcefulness enable her to flourish in disparate contexts. *Tripotage Miniatures* features in its title a French word meaning 'manipulation' or, Meredith's preferred translation, 'jiggery pokery'. These miniatures display conceptual playfulness, but also hands-on engagement with sound as material. There are melodic, rhythmic and harmonic ingredients here that might have been deployed simply to charm or mesmerise. Instead, Meredith's declared intention is to explore 'different kinds of opacity, glitch, fuzz, shade and grime'. She draws attention to the smudges on the pane, traces of present life, rather than some distant vista.

**Anthony Braxton** emerged from an earlier generation yet, at a fundamental level, there is an overlap between his orientation as a composer and that of Wee. 'Music involves living,' Braxton has said, 'it's not just the execution of sounds in space.' Extensive experience as an improvising saxophonist led him to that perspective. Percussionist Max Roach, a towering figure in jazz history, found the exhilaration of performing alongside Braxton comparable to the thrill of playing with the legendary Charlie Parker. Braxton's compositions combine elements of standard notation with his own idiosyncratic system of symbols, designed in the light of his conviction that music making should be a process of exploration and growth. *Composition No. 136*, open to any combination of instruments, aims to promote interaction between musicians without sacrificing their expressive independence. A drawing at the head of the score depicts skiers gliding downhill beneath a blazing sun. Instrumentalists guided by this score are tacitly encouraged to be like those skiers, sharing overall direction and momentum, while cultivating their own amalgam of balance and flair.

Song forms, in their communicative directness, appeal deeply to **Alex Paxton**, and he takes real pleasure in crafting a good tune. *Don't Leave Me Behind* takes its title from the words of a song that surfaces in the course of this characteristically ebullient new piece. Singing voices, live and sampled, actually feature throughout the composition, forming an audible current of human presence and emotion. The lyrics may register an air of anxiety, but the persistence of melody and a resilient groove prove to be buoyantly supportive, despite being buffeted by a swirl of contesting musical idioms, reflective of Paxton's eclectic interests. Driven by seemingly unbounded energy this composition embraces frequent structural discontinuities and fragmentation of anticipated patterns. Still Paxton manages to harmonise, continuously, the dislocations and disparities, transforming the daunting prospect of a data-laden maelstrom into a jubilant experience of sustained sensory elation.

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