

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 28 March 2024
7.30pm

Divine Revolutions: Revolving around God: Circular music and the Divine

Daniel Pioro violin

The Marian Consort

Caroline Halls soprano
Alexandra Kidgell soprano
Sarah Anne Champion alto
Rory McCleery alto, artistic director
Will Wright tenor
Benjamin Durrant tenor
Jon Stainsby bass
Thomas Lowen bass

Tom Coult (b.1988)

O ecclesia oculi tui (after Hildegard of Bingen) (2023)
world première

Daniel Pioro (b.1986)

O virtus Sapientie (after Hildegard of Bingen) (2024)
world première

Nick Martin (b. 1989)

Growth Rings (2020) *UK première*
*Kyrie - Ciacconna • A Foreign Song • Little
Astronaut • Wachsenden Ringen*

Interval

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin BWV1004 with
accompanying chorales in the *Chaconne* (1720)
*I. Allemande • II. Courante • III. Sarabande • IV.
Gigue • V. Chaconne*

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Tonight's concert reflects Daniel Pioro's fascination with reframing the violin's solo repertoire. By mixing the instrument among the voices of the Marian Consort, the violin assumes a wide range of functions that serve the music in different ways, from fellow co-chanter embedded within the ensemble, to solo instrument. The programme also shifts between sacred and secular music, unified by recurring themes such as the meditation on human mortality and a searching for consolation in the face of the limits of human knowledge and our experience of the world.

In **Tom Coult's** take on **Hildegard of Bingen's** devotional chant *O ecclesia oculi tui*, the conventional roles of voice and instrument are turned upside down: the solo violin plays the chant as though a wordless song, including various embellishments, while the voices perform the accompanying drone-like role in freely composed sustained harmonies. In Coult's words, 'the voices provide soft halos of sound to surround the melodic line.' The minor-modal tonality of the chant combined with Hildegard's characteristic melodic twists, leaps and bends follows and emphasises the emotive imagery of her lyrics, which celebrate the life of Saint Ursula, a martyr and leader of early Christians.

Following Coult's reworking, a second chant by Hildegard of Bingen, *O virtus Sapientie*, has been reimagined by **Daniel Pioro** and The Marian Consort especially for this concert. Together they explore the intertwined natures of the text and melody so as to, Pioro explains: 'get to the heart of each word, creating whispers and echoes, rather than dwelling on their meaning, in a near-silent meditation.'

Nick Martin's *Growth Rings* continues the exploration of sacred texts while introducing secular writers concerned with the numinous and the spiritual. Over the span of around 30 minutes, Martin's piece travails extraordinary terrain, each of its four movements revealing a unique character that reflects the chosen text, shifting between extrovert and introvert moods. Composed for Daniel Pioro, *Growth Rings* gives ample platform to demonstrate the soloist's virtuosity in dialogue with the singers, whether in dazzlingly challenging passages, or in the most delicate moments of repose and tenderness.

The first movement *Kyrie - Ciacconna* outlines an ABA structure, moving away from and back to the sacred *Kyrie* text via a central *Ciacconna* section, which sets Edith Södergran's poem. The sparser though still luminous textures of the *Kyrie* evoke the soundworld of renaissance vocal music, while the *Ciacconna* foreshadows the Bach later in the concert, with its chordal violin part and intricate vocal polyphonies that spiral with descending bass lines, typical of the *ciacconna* form.

The second movement, *A Foreign Song*, follows an ABAB structure that mirrors the four stanzas of the Wallace Stevens poem. The opening E flat pulsed sonority provides a bed atop which solo voices and violin shift between minor and major colours, almost as if blue notes dinting the harmonic pulsations. The B sections break out from the fixity of the pulses to a freer *quasi senza misura* section, highly intricate in its rhythmic flow and polyphonic layerings. The second B section returns with greater speed as the whirling violin part (marked 'spluttering') circles the voices in their

emotive setting of the words 'without human meaning, without human feeling', which point to a cosmic sublime; terrifying though still beautiful and awe-inspiring.

The third movement, setting Robert Macfarlane's poem *Little Astronaut*, opens with the violin dramatically descending in contrast to the voices' rising lines, until the music solidifies in a driving *con moto* in which the violin rapidly darts in and out of the ensemble. The following section strips down the texture to a *ppp dolcissimo* before growing again with improvisatory melodic coils in the voices, met with rhythmic stabs. The central expansive section pares the music back yet further into homophony, reaching a climax over the words 'following your song' with a radiant though complex C minor/B major sonority. The movement seems to begin again as the opening section returns, followed by the fast *con moto* and then slow *molto doloroso* sections. Thus, the movement follows an ABC-ABC structure, where each section reappears with variations and deviations, and eventually leads *attacca* into the final movement.

In the fourth movement, *Wachsenden Ringen*, Martin sets Rilke's poem *Ich lebe mein Leben*, where the idea of circling around the world and God finds representation in the fast and flowing violin part, which speeds above the voices in rapid arpeggio ostinati. Each time the material returns in this movement, the violin appears faster and faster, eventually met by the voices in a blazing *molto appassionato* climax. The following contrasting section here draw the listener into a calmer and more intimate space, though one still deep, with the use of the full ensemble register, from the low bass voices to the violin's stratospheric upper limits. The music settles in a somewhat surprising final orbit: a lullaby that rocks between E and D major, melting away with each repetition as the violin sings ever fainter into the sky.

Johann Sebastian Bach's magisterial solo violin work Partita No. 2 in D minor BWV1004 concludes tonight's concert, and brings yet another alternative and vocal perspective on an otherwise instrumental piece, with chorale fragments embedded in the final *Chaconne* movement. The first four movements consist of typical Baroque dance forms: *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande* and *Gigue*. The final *Chaconne* lasts just as long as the preceding four movements put together, and is widely hailed as the apex of the violin repertoire; in Yehudi Menuhin's words, it's 'the greatest structure for solo violin that exists.'

German musicologist Helga Thoene developed an elaborate though controversial theory in her book *Ciaccona: Tanz oder Tombeau?* that the *Chaconne* is full of coded references to various existing chorales by Bach, and to religious symbols. Her speculative take on the covert numerology of the work led her to propose a new arrangement of the *Chaconne* that incorporates numerous chorale fragments, which various recordings have since explored. Overall, Thoene argues that the Partita stands as a memorial piece for Bach's first wife Maria Barbara, who died unexpectedly in 1720 while Bach was away.

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Tom Coult (b.1988)

**O ecclesia oculi tui
(after Hildegard of
Bingen) (2023)**

*Hildegard of Bingen
World première*

O Ecclesia,
Oculi tui similes saphiro sunt,
Et aures tue monti Bethel,
Et nasus tuus est sicut mons
mirre et thuris,
Et os tuum quasi sonus
aquarum multarum.

In visione vere fidei
Ursula Filium
Dei amavit
Et virum cum hoc seculo
reliquit
Et in solem
aspexit
Atque pulcherrimum
iuvenem vocavit, dicens:

In multo desiderio desideravi
ad te venire
Et in celestibus nuptiis
tecum sedere,
Per alienam viam ad te
currens
Velut nubes que in purissimo
aere currit similis saphiro.

Et postquam Ursula sic
dixerat, rumor iste
Per omnes populos
exiit.

Et dixerunt:
Innocentia puellaris
ignorantie
Nescit quid
dicit.

Et ceperunt ludere
cum illa
In magna symphonia,
Usque dum ignea sarcina
Super eam cecidit.

Unde omnes cognoscebant
Quia contemptus mundi
est sicut mons
Bethel.

Et cognoverunt etiam

O Church, your eyes

O Church,
like sapphire are your
eyes,
Mt Bethel are your ears,
your nose a mount of
myrrh and frankincense,
your mouth the sound of
many waters.

In true faith's vision
did Ursula with God's Son
fall in love -
a husband with the world
did she abandon,
to gaze instead upon the
sun
and call upon the Fairest
Youth to say:

'With deep desire have I
desired to come to you,
to sit with you at heaven's
marriage feast -
I'm racing by a different
way to you,
like a sapphire cloud that
races 'cross the
clearest sky.'

When Ursula had made
this declaration,
report of it went out
through all the people.

And they declared, 'The
innocence of girlish
ignorance
knows not of what it
speaks.'

And they began in
concert to
make fun of her -
until the fiery weight
fell on her shoulders.

For then they recognised
that such contempt for
the world is as Mt
Bethel.

They also recognised

Suavissimum odorem
mirre et
thuris,
Quoniam contemptus mundi
Super omnia ascendit.

Tunc diabolus membra sua
invasit,
Que nobilissimos mores in
corporibus istis
occiderunt.

Et hoc in alta voce omnia
elementa audierunt
Et ante thronum Dei
dixerunt:

Wach! rubicundus sanguis
innocentis agni
In desponsatione sua effusus
est.

Hoc audiant
omnes celi
Et in summa symphonia
laudent Agnum
Dei,

Quia guttur serpentis antiqui
In istis
margaritis
Materie Verbi Dei
suffocatum est.

the sweetest scent of
myrrh and
frankincense,
for contempt for the
world
mounts over all.

But then the devil seized
their limbs,
to slay the virgins' noblest
bearings with their
bodies.

And this with piercing cry
heard all the elements
and 'fore God's throne
declared:

Ach! The scarlet blood of
the innocent Lamb
to pledge his troth is
shed.

And all the heavens hear
this
and praise the Lamb of
God in symphony
supreme,

for the ancient serpent's
throat
is choked upon these
pearls
compiled from the Word
of God.

Daniel Piore (b.1986)

**O virtus Sapientie
(after Hildegard of
Bingen) (2024)**

*Hildegard of Bingen
World première*

O virtus Sapientie,
Que circuiens circuisti,
Comprehendendo omnia
In una via que habet vitam,
Tres alas habens,
Quarum una in altum
volat
Et tertia undique volat.

Laus tibi sit, sicut te decet, O
Sapientia.

O Wisdom's energy

O Wisdom's energy!
Whirling, you encircle
and everything embrace
in the single way of life.
Three wings you have:
one soars above into the
heights,
and all about now flies the
third.

Praise be to you, as is
your due, O Wisdom.

*Please do not turn the page until the song and its
accompaniment have ended.*

Nick Martin (b.1989)

Growth Rings (2020)

UK première

Kyrie - Ciaccona

Liturgical text, Edith Södergran

Kyrie eléison Lord, have mercy
Christe eléison Christ, have mercy

Den röda solen går upp Utan tankar Och är lika mot alla. Vi fröjda oss åt solen såsom barn. Det kommer en dag då vårt stoft skall sönderfalla, Det är detsamma när det sker. Nu lyser solen in i våra hjärtans innersta vrå Fyllande allt med tanklöshet Stark som skogen, vintern och havet.	The red sun rises thoughtlessly and is like them all. We enjoyed the sun as children. On the day when we disintegrate into dust, it will be the same. Now the sun shines in the innermost corner of hearts, filling everything with thoughtlessness, as strong as the forest, winter, and the sea.
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A Foreign Song

Wallace Stevens

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze decor,

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

Little Astronaut

Robert Macfarlane

Little astronaut, where have you gone, and how is
your song still torrenting on?

Aren't you short of breath as you climb higher, up
there in the thin air, with your magical song still
tumbling on?

Right now I need you, for my sadness has come
again and my heart grows flatter - so I'm coming to
find you by following your song,

Keeping on into deep space, past dying stars and
exploding suns, to where at last. Little astronaut,
you sing your heart out at all dark matter.

Wachsenden Ringen

Rainer Maria Rilke

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen, Die sich über die Dinge ziehn. Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht vollbringen, Aber versuchen will ich ihn.	I live my life in ever- expanding circles that reach across all things. I may not see the end of the last one, but I will give it a try.
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Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,	I circle around God, around the ancient tower,
--	--

Und ich weiss noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm Oder ein grosser Gesang.	and still I know not: am I a falcon, a storm or a vast song?
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Interval

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin BWV1004 with accompanying chorales in the Chaconne (1720)

I. Allemande

II. Courante

III. Sarabande

IV. Gigue

V. Chaconne

Christ lag in todesbanden	Christ lay in death's bonds
Halleluja!	Halleluja!
Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt	No-one could restrain Death
Dein Will' gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich, Auf Erden wie im Himmelreich.	May your will be done, Lord God, both on earth as in heaven.
Befiehl du deine wege Wo sol ich fliegen hin	Entrust your way Where shall I flee
Jesu meine Freude	Jesus my joy
Auf meinen lieben Gott Trau' ich in Angst und Not,	In my beloved God I trust in anxiety and trouble
Gib uns Geduld in Leidenszeit,	Give us patience in time of sorrow
Des will ich allzeit harren.	For which I shall wait always
Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her.	From heaven above I come here
Wie sol ich dich empfangen Jesu, deine Passion will ich jetzt bedenken	How shall I embrace you Jesus, your Passion I will now consider
In meines Herzens Grunde Dein Nam' und Kreuz allein	In the depths of my heart your name and cross alone
Funkelt all Zeit und Stundem Drauf kann ich fröhlich sein.	Shine at every moment, making me able to rejoice.
Dem höchsten sei Lob, Ehr und Preis	To the highest be praise, honour and reward
Nun lob, mein' Seel', den Herren.	Now praise, my soul, the Lord.

Lyrics of 'Little Astronaut' are taken from 'Lark', in *The Lost Words* by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris (Penguin: 2017)

Translations of Bingen by Nathaniel M Campbell, hildegard-society.org.
'Kyrie - Ciacconna' by Daniel Grimley. 'Wachsenden Ringen' by Jean du Monde. Bach kindly provided by tonight's artists.