

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 2 June 2022 7.30pm

Jess Gillam Ensemble

Jess Gillam saxophone

Ciaran McCabe violin

Michael Jones violin

Eoin Schmidt-Martin viola

Gabriella Swallow cello

Sam Becker bass

Leif Kaner-Lidström piano

Elsa Bradley percussion

CLASSIC *fm*

Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM

James Blake (b.1988)

Will Gregory (b.1959)

Nico Muhly (b.1981)

Alex Baranowski (b.1983)

Ryuichi Sakamoto (b.1952)

Ástor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

Retrograde (2012) *arranged by Benjamin Rimmer and Alex Maydew*

Orbit (2020)

Pressure of Speech (2022)

Reflections (2022)

Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence (1983) *arranged by John Metcalfe*

From *Histoire du Tango* (1986) *arranged by Simon Parkin*

Bordel 1900 • Café 1930 • Nightclub 1960

Interval

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788)

Thom Yorke (b.1968)

Björk (b.1965)

Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

John Harle (b.1956)

Allegro assai from Flute Concerto in A minor Wq. 166 (1750) *arranged by Simon Parkin*

Susprium (2018) *arranged by Benjamin Rimmer*

Venus as a Boy (1993) *arranged by John Metcalfe*

Shine You No More (2017) *arranged by Simon Parkin*

Adagio ma non tanto from Violin Sonata No. 3 in E BWV1016 (by 1725, rev. by 1740) *arranged by Mats Lidström*

Flare (2021)

Thank you to the Friends of Wigmore Hall

The generosity of our Friends has been invaluable during the difficulties of the last two years and is proving instrumental as we rebuild our audiences, support our artists, and ensure a vibrant concert series for all to enjoy in the Hall and online.

To join our community of Friends and to take advantage of advance booking for our forthcoming 2022/23 Season, visit: wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends. Your support will truly make a difference.

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



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



Magic between notes and words

Although largely synonymous with jazz, the saxophone has a long, rich history in classical music, R&B, rock and pop. Certainly between the 1940s and 1980s the 'horn solo' graced many a song that found favour with large audiences. The great versatility of the instrument is well reflected by the highly eclectic programme Jess Gillam presents tonight. She will perform works by Icelandic singer **Björk**, Japanese multi-instrumentalist **Ryuichi Sakamoto**, English saxophonist-composer-producer **John Harle** and the German icon **JS Bach**, among others.

An award-winning soprano saxophonist and BBC Radio 3 presenter, Gillam did not have to think too hard about her selections, primarily because she knows how and far and wide her instrument's 'distinct yet malleable sound' has travelled over time. 'It sits comfortably in so many styles and genres while refusing to sit in a box at all,' she says. 'I try and be as open-minded and curious as possible when listening and, if the music makes sense in a programme, I reflect that in concert.'

While the breadth of the setlist, which also includes *Pressure of Speech*, a new piece by American composer **Nico Muhly**, promises to be intriguing and inspiring for listeners in equal measure, it duly presented quite a playful puzzle to Gillam and her ensemble. To move from one artist to another who may be significantly different, musically, and yet still retain a degree of narrative coherence, she had to greatly scrutinize the running order, shifting things around to map out the optimum route through all the songs. 'A concert is such a special exchange of energy between performer and audience, I am conscious of the audience when programming!' she makes clear.

That point of view could be traced back to Gillam's formative years. The polished tone and measured phrasing that graced her successful 2010 debut album *Rise* came after long years of study and practice. She started playing, aged 7, at the Barracudas Carnival Arts Centre in Barrow, Cumbria, where the onus was very much on 'community and people coming together to create something and have fun.' A similarly congenial atmosphere has marked her work to date, but if there is an engaging energy that Gillam carries to the stage it may be down to the fact that, by her own admission, she is still learning her craft.

During the pandemic she completed a Masters degree at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, which has broadened her knowledge of quintessential European composers. 'My relationship with classical music started quite a bit later, when I started to play more notated music. I am still constantly discovering and exploring the great works.'

That said, one of the key characteristics of tonight's repertoire is the presence of several compositions that originally featured a strong lead vocal and thought-provoking lyrics. Several legendary horn players, notably Lester Young, have stated that any

instrumental interpretation of a piece with a text requires great emotional investment as well as technical prowess from the player in question so that they can get *inside* the meaning and feeling of the source material to do it justice. Gillam has also become fascinated by this process. 'I love playing vocal melodies on saxophone, I grew up listening to all kinds of music, my dad had a huge CD collection,' says Gillam, who recently explained that she had an epiphany as a child after hearing the soaring sax solo on 'The Whole of the Moon' by 1980s pop favourites The Waterboys, and was irresistibly drawn to the way the instrumental sounds enhanced a song largely defined by the intriguing turns of phrase of vocalist Mike Scott. 'I often try and emulate the sound of the singer,' Gillam explains. 'The magic is between the notes and the words - taking away the lyrics presents an interesting challenge of recreating their atmosphere and intention through instrumental sound.'

Drawing something fresh from a familiar theme is a mission that has long exercised brilliant minds working in many different genres. The legendary Gil Evans, one of the defining figures in the history of orchestral jazz, used the charming description 'new bottle, old wine' to describe this reimagining, and as much as he penned a number of exquisite original pieces, he also excelled in the precious art of *arranging*, whereby fresh harmony, texture or tempo significantly alters the character of a composition. The arranger can be a transformer.

For tonight's concert there are a number of notable figures in that role: **Benjamin Rimmer**, **Alex Maydew**, **John Metcalfe**, **Simon Parkin** and **Mats Lidström** all bring a wide range of additional nuance and ambiance to pieces as disparate as **Thom Yorke's** *Susprium*, **James Blake's** *Retrograde* and **Rune Tonsgaard Sorensen's** *Shine You No More* all the while retaining something of the essence of the original works.

One part of the programme that could be particularly interesting features movements taken from the suite *Histoire du Tango* by the legendary Argentine bandoneon virtuoso and innovative composer **Ástor Piazzolla**, whose centenary was celebrated at Wigmore Hall as part of last year's London Jazz Festival by a band that featured his grandson, drummer Daniel 'Pipi' Piazzolla. Gillam, like many others, recognizes that Ástor's works are enchanting because of the broad emotional spectrum they cover, highlighting the complexities and contradictions of the human condition. 'One of the things I love most about Piazzolla's music is the way he often seems to sit in the grey area of emotion - that beautiful place music can take us to between despair and ecstasy. With music, opposites can coexist and I think the music of Piazzolla often captures that bittersweet feeling. It's music full of fierce, fiery passion but also of tender, sweet melodic beauty.'

© Kevin Le Gendre 2022

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.