

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 2 March 2024
7.30pm

Héloïse Werner soprano
Helen Charlston mezzo-soprano
Anne Denholm harp
Mishka Rushdie Momen piano

Héloïse Werner (b.1991)	Thunder clears (2024) <i>world première</i> Co-commissioned by Wigmore Hall
Anna Meredith (b.1978)	Fin like a Flower (2010)
Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)	Sospira, respira Op. 6 No. 17 (pub. 1657)
Héloïse Werner	an inviting object (2022) <i>UK première</i>
Kaija Saariaho (1952-2023)	Il pleut (1986) <i>arranged by Héloïse Werner</i>
Owain Park (b.1993)	A singer's ode to Sappho from <i>Battle Cry</i> (2021)
Barbara Strozzi	Sonetto. Proemio dell'opera from <i>Il primo libro de madrigali</i> Op. 1 (pub. 1644) <i>arranged by Héloïse Werner</i>
Errollyn Wallen (b.1958)	Tree (new arrangement) (2009) Commissioned by Wigmore Hall
<i>Interval</i>	
Hannah Kendall (b.1984)	Tuxedo: Diving Bell 2 (2021)
John Cage (1912-1992)	Four6 (1990-2)

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Curated by Héloïse Werner, this evening's concert offers a programme full of subtle timbral shifts and expressive reflections between the two contrasting voices and the piano and harp. As the music moves from solo works to quartets, our focus as listeners may be drawn inwards to a single point, balanced in the poise of a duet, blurred as the instruments and voices deliver similar yet crucially distinctive tones and allowed to drift into the illusionary as the warm and resonant acoustic gives rise to abstract reverberations and spontaneous colours.

The solo works in the programme, beginning with **Werner's** most recent vocal piece, offer us the chance to hear each of these highly distinguished performers in their own right and enjoy their unique musicianship in isolation. Written especially for this concert, *Thunder clears* invites us into the rain-speckled sound of a drenched landscape, veiled imagery stretching out quietly before us as the deep rumble vanishes, the music reflecting the words of Ali Lewis's poem *Art*. Werner's other work in the concert, *an inviting object* for solo piano, was composed for tonight's pianist Mishka Rushdie Momen and premièred at the Lucerne Festival in 2022. As the title suggests, the music here draws us into the delicate sonorities of the piano, closer and closer until we are perhaps aware of the most minute of details in the sound as the tone of the instrument is carefully manipulated. **Owain Park's** song 'A singer's ode to Sappho' alludes to a deeply nocturnal setting full of space and silence where the solo performer appears very much alone as they sing mournfully into the night. The piece was written for this evening's performer, Helen Charlston, and is on her album *Battle Cry* (Delphian Records). In **Hannah Kendall's** *Tuxedo: Diving Bell 2*, the timbres of the harp are transformed into a seeming multitude of different instruments with vibrant, buzzing tones alongside muted, punchy attacks, all within a tuning system more reminiscent of a kalimba (thumb-piano) than the chromatic regularity we usually associate with the traditional Western harp. The piece is the fifth in a series of works inspired by Jean-Michel Basquiat's artwork *Tuxedo*.

Second in tonight's programme is **Anna Meredith's** *Fin like a Flower*, which sets words by Philip Ridley in a mesmerising, dreamlike duo. A lilting harp ostinato begins in hypnotic fashion before the voice, eerily suspended, tells a strange short story of fatal

attraction as the rhythmic material beneath carries an air of subtle menace. The only work heard as a trio this evening is **Barbara Strozzi's** anguished and sorrowful *Sospira, respira* ('Sigh, breathe') for soprano, mezzo-soprano and basso continuo (harp). Single, powerful words are stretched out to convey the emotional weight of heartbreak, betrayal and coercion in this tragic and dramatic song. In contrast, Strozzi's 'Sonetto' is a joyous work full of elated motifs and expansive, lyrical phrases. The song has been carefully adapted for the whole quartet to highlight the extended cadences that in turn reflect the sense of wonder and eternity in the words.

In a new arrangement of **Kaija Saariaho's** *Il pleut* ('It is raining'), originally a duo for voice and piano (or harp) but specially devised as a quartet for this concert, the programme reaches its most distilled point. Falling droplets of sound accompany floating, static lines to create music of serene simplicity in this setting of surreal words by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire. The performers are grateful to the Saariaho Estate for giving permission for this new adaptation of the work. Delicate single notes also characterise the opening of **Errollyn Wallen's** *Tree* but here we are taken on a different path, with contemplative vocal musings growing in expression and the accompaniment blossoming in reflection. Starting out as a work for voice and piano, recorded by Wallen herself on the NMC Songbook disc, the composer has generously arranged the work for tonight's concert. The final piece we'll hear this evening is **John Cage's** *Four6*, a duration work where the four performers must each predetermine 12 sounds of their own choosing which are then performed during the times specified in the score; the durations and sounds indicated by time brackets and the numbers 1 - 12 respectively. Although simple in its conception, the piece allows for the listener to experience a wealth of ideas and sensations through consideration of, for example, the source of the sounds that the performers have chosen to predetermine, the way in which they recreate them each time, the interactions between the 44 cells of musical material and the structural make-up of the piece as a whole; the resulting compilation of these elements being unique to every new performance.

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Héloïse Werner (b.1991)

Thunder clears (2024)

Ali Lewis

Thunder clears its throat.
The cloud is almost black

And the shape of England,
Like its own weather map.

The rain dribbles shorthand
On the window and blurs

The crotchets of the birds
On the stave of the fence

Who don't sing the notes
They faithfully represent.

Anna Meredith (b.1978)

Fin like a Flower (2010)

Philip Ridley

You wore your fin
Like a flower
And by petal
And perfume
Enticed me
Beyond
Land's
End
To your
Teeth
Oh, consume me
Piece by Piece
Oh, no release
I'm in your power
My fin like a flower.

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

Sospira, respira Op. 6 Sigh, breathe No. 17 (pub. 1657)

Anonymous

Sospira, Respira, Amato, Sprezzato, Mio core, Traditore, Chi t'ingannò? Chi ti fidò? No, no, pene non più! È sprezzata d'amor la servitù.	Sigh, breathe, loved, disdained, my heart, traitor, who deceived you? Who believed in you? No, no, no more pains! Love disdains servitude.
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Chi mi tiene? Catene, Desiri, Sospiri, Contenti, Tormenti. Chi m'inganna? Una tiranna.	Who detains me? Chains, desires, sighs, contentments, torments. Who deceives me? A tyrant.
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Héloïse Werner

an inviting object (2022)

Kaija Saariaho (1952-2023)

Il pleut (1986)

Guillaume Apollinaire

Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles Etaient mortes même dans le souvenir C'est vous aussi qu'il pleut merveilleuses Rencontres de ma vie ô gouttelettes Et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir Tout un univers de villes auriculaires Ecoute s'il pleut tandis que le regret et Le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique Ecoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent En haut et en bas	It is raining women's voices as if they were dead even in memory it's also you that it is raining wondrous confluences of my life O droplets and these rearing clouds begin to neigh a whole universe of auricular towns listen whenever it rains while regret and disdain weep an ancient music hear the bonds fall that contain you high and low
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It is raining

Owain Park (b.1993)

A singer's ode to Sappho from *Battle Cry*

(2021)

Georgia Way

Oh Sappho! My voice
Is hoarse tonight,
Like torn papyrus.

It maims the words
Gathering in the temple
To your name.

Are you there, Sappho?
Hear my voice when I call.
I pray, dwell in me:

Make my voice your lyre,
Take my cries.
In the honeyed night,

Your face, Lady,
Will I seek: singing until,
In gilded sandals,

The dawn steps into birdsong.

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

Sonetto. Proemio dell'opera from *Il primo libro de madrigali Op. 1*

(pub. 1644)

Giulio Strozzi

Mercé di voi, mia fortunata
stella,
Volo di Pindo in fra i beati
chori,
E coronata d'immortali
allori
Forse detta sarò Saffo
novella.

Così l'impresa faticosa e
bella
Sia felice del canto e
degl'amori,
Che s'unisco le voci i nostri
cori
Non disunisca mai voglia
rubella.

O che vaga e dolcissima
armonia
Fanno due alme innamorate
e fide,

Sonnet: the start

Thanking my lucky
stars,
I fly to you from the happy
choirs on Mount Pindo
crowned with laurels of
immortality.
Maybe they'll call me the
new Sappho.

I hope this beautiful journey
- this difficult journey -
is filled with happy songs,
and stories of love
so that our hearts, united
by singing
are never torn because we
want different things.

What happy, sweet
harmonies
two faithful souls in love
can make.

Che quel che l'una vuol l'altra desia, Che gioisce al gioir, ch'al rider ride, Né mai sospiran, che'l sospir non sia D'una morte che sana e non uccide.	What one desires, the other desires too. Each delights in the other's joy, laughs with the other's laughter, and sighs only with the sigh of death... a sigh that heals, and never kills.
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Errollyn Wallen (b.1958)

Tree (new arrangement) (2009)

Errollyn Wallen

Does the tree own me?
Does the tree own the moon, the impassive moon?
Do the leaves seem to sing in the dark?

Does the tree own my heart?
Do I lie,
Do I lie
In the arms of his art, confounding art?

I'm perplexed by the rune
I'm perplexed by rooted trees,

By rooted trees.

Interval

Hannah Kendall (b.1984)

Tuxedo: Diving Bell 2 (2021)

John Cage (1912-1992)

Four6 (1990-2)

*Texts of 'Thunder clears', 'Fin like a Flower', 'A singer's ode to Sappho'
and 'Tree' all printed with kind permission from the authors.
Translation of Saariaho by Jean du Monde.*