

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 2 September 2021 7.30pm

**the then + the now = nowtime**

*UK Première*

**Elaine Mitchener** vocalist

*Approx. 50 minutes in duration without an interval*

*Followed by a post-performance discussion with composer Hannah Kendall*

*the then + the now = now time* is an exploration of Walter Benjamin's notion of *Eingedenken* – a historical consciousness in which the past is not understood and glorified as something closed and complete; a form of remembering that emphasises the past's relentless presence. Against the mediating, conciliatory thrust of *Erinnerung* (memory), *Eingedenken* remains true to suffering in the past by refusing reconciliation with past wrongs.

Mitchener's artistic work as a vocalist, movement artist and composer is permeated by the awareness of past and present forms of discrimination, post-colonial wounds and its effect on humanity. *the then + the now = nowtime* is an artistic quest to politicise the past, undoing and unsettling time and space, transforming notions of remembrance through performance.

Commissioned by MaerzMusik, Festival für Zeitfragen, 2019.

## Creative Team

Elaine Mitchener | Soloist, Concept & Music

Dam Van Huynh | Direction & Choreography

Patricia Roldan Polo | Lighting

Antony Hateley | Original Lighting Design

Ben Marc | Studio Technician

Tommaso Petrolo | Assistant Director

## Welcome back to Wigmore Hall

We are grateful to our Friends and donors for their generosity as we rebuild a full series of concerts in 2021/22 and reinforce our efforts to reach audiences everywhere through our broadcasts. To help us present inspirational concerts and support our community of artists, please make a donation by visiting our website: [wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate). Every gift is making a difference. Thank you.

*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](https://www.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



*The following text is taken from a review of the première of the then + the now = now time at Berlin's MaerzMusik, March 2019. The review was published on the website of the online music journal National Sawdust, May 2019.*

Citing Walter Benjamin's concept of *Eingedenken*, a coinage that conveys a memory blending remembrance and mindfulness – not to erase or memorialize the past, but to reshape it as a living thing – Elaine Mitchener and her choreographer, Dam Van Huynh, created a single-performer work that loosely wove together movement streaked with violence and visceral struggle, quotations from Benjamin, bell hooks, Sojourner Truth, James Baldwin, and Abel Meeropol related to Benjamin's concept, the lyrics of Billie Holiday's forever-bracing "Strange Fruit", and elliptical imagery by the performer herself.

Mitchener, who's an adept within multiple musical traditions, including improvisation, functioned as a multivalent vessel, stringing together images and memories of what the descendants of African slaves have been forced to endure in the U.K. and the U.S., among other locales. She stretched, repeated, and reordered words with the dexterity and resourcefulness of a seasoned improviser, extracting shifting meanings and changing emphasis.

Her presence was intense. She arrived on the stage and seemed to survey the audience, peering out with a mixture of

fearlessness and suspicion, before wending her way through the thorny text. Her singing was packed with extended techniques – clicking, snorts, growls – that punctuated phrases like, "*The true picture of the past whizzes by / Only as a picture... is the past to be held fast.*"

For much of the piece she was accompanied by a collage-like backing track that included a Parliamentary speech by British MP David Lammy reflecting on the inhumanity visited upon the descendants of slaves living in the U.K. (the Windrush generation) despite their having served in the British armed services in both world wars, throbbing low-end bass tones, crowd noises, a Caribbean folk song – imbuing diverse meaning to the torn-apart words she sung.

Mitchener's piece deliberately asked questions without clear answers – as if there ever could be one. She provided an act of interrogation rife with pain and confusion, leaving a trail of memory that required heavy sorting and contemplation on the viewer's part.

– Peter Margasak

*For its UK première at the Wigmore Hall, the work has been adapted and updated to suit the venue.*