

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 4 November 2021 7.30pm

Jess Gillam saxophone

Zeynep Özsuca piano

Shelagh Sutherland piano



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

John Harle (b.1956)

RANT! (2018)

Ayanna Witter-Johnson

Lumina Rhythm (2021)

Barbara Thompson (b.1944)

The Unseen Way (2015)

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Sonata in F minor TWV41:f1 (pub. 1728-9) *transcribed by Simon Parkin*
I. Triste • II. Allegro • III. Andante • IV. Vivace

Thom Yorke (b.1968)

Susprium (2018) *arranged by Benjamin Rimmer*

Chilly Gonzales (b.1972)

Overnight (2004) *arranged by Simon Parkin*

Graham Fitkin (b.1963)

Hard Fairy (1994)

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. 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 • 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



Over the past half century, saxophonist, composer and producer **John Harle** has worked with everyone from Paul McCartney to Elvis Costello, Herbie Hancock to Michael Nyman, composing for film, TV and the concert hall. But his name is still synonymous with the saxophone, for which he has composed more than 25 new works over the course of his career. *RANT!* (2018) was composed specifically for Jess Gillam and was conceived as a portrait of her as a musician. Harle wanted to capture 'her energy, her sound and her presence, painted in music from her own part of England', so the work is built around excerpts of Cumbrian folksong. A wistful quote from the folk tune 'Cumberland Nelly' sets a hushed tone at the opening, but this is gradually whipped up into something far more energetic and exuberant, climaxing in a joyful kind of hoedown.

-

Lumina Rhythm started out as a four-minute work called *Lumina* commissioned by Jess Gillam earlier this year. Jess asked me to compose a piece for solo soprano saxophone and gave me free rein which was great. I spent some time listening to the breadth of music that Jess plays and decided to write a song that would give her the space to express a variety of elements with the combination of melody, lyrical ideas, harmony and rhythm. *Lumina Rhythm* evokes the spirit of adventure and grace. An admiration for life itself and a curiosity to explore it!

© Ayanna Witter-Johnson 2021

-

In the saxophone world, **Barbara Thompson** is as close as it gets to royalty. She has been a pioneering performer, composer and bandleader for nearly five decades, and although in recent years Parkinson's disease has compromised her ability to perform, it has not dimmed her creativity. Only this year she released a new studio album, and while it is the first on which she does not feature as a soloist (the young saxophonists of the National Youth Jazz Orchestra take her place), the original compositions are all her own. *The Unseen Way* is the final track from its predecessor, *The Last Fandango*, which was released in 2015 and features Thompson's final recorded performances. It was inspired by a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, which encourages us all to follow our hearts and forgo the beaten track: 'Where roads are made I lose my way... I ask my heart if its blood carries the wisdom of the unseen way'.

The music of **Georg Philipp Telemann** may seem out of place in a saxophone recital, the instrument not even having been invented until nearly a century after his death. But Telemann's music for wind instruments has an elegance and fluency that

few of his contemporaries could match, so much so that his works seem to transpose effortlessly from one instrument to another. His Sonata in F minor TWV41:f1 is a case in point. Originally composed for bassoon, it is so ideally suited to the saxophone in this transcription by **Simon Parkin** that the historical mismatch seems irrelevant. The stately opening movement paves the way for a sprightly *Allegro* and rather more sombre *Andante*, but it is the closing *Vivace*, with its virtuosic passagework, that is the sonata's real showpiece.

Fast forward nearly 300 years and this cyclical passagework can be traced through to the minimalism of *Suspirium*, a song composed by Radiohead's **Thom Yorke** as part of the soundtrack for the 2018 horror film *Suspiria*. If this sounds far-fetched, listen to the arpeggiated accompaniment or the occasional snatches of a descending bassline that lend the song a sense of steady propulsion. These are tropes that are grounded in and abstracted from Baroque practices, anchoring the listener in something deeply familiar, against the rather eerie, melancholic melody above.

There is a similar sense of tranquillity and echoes of the same idle melodic wandering in *Overnight* (2004) by the Canadian musician, songwriter and producer **Chilly Gonzales**. Gonzales has written for and collaborated with pop artists including Drake, Daft Punk and Jarvis Cocker, and earned a GRAMMY along the way, but he began his career as a jazz pianist. *Overnight* is a beautiful example of his effortless and uncomplicated personal voice – wistful, tender and compelling. Like Yorke's *Suspirium*, it has an improvisatory character that is continually cycling back on itself, as though gently mulling over and processing a single, preoccupying thought.

Today's programme closes with a rather more up-tempo work by **Graham Fitkin**, composed in his characteristically post-minimalist style. Fitkin has openly acknowledged a wide range of influences on his work, stretching from modern rock bands to jazz pioneers Keith Jarrett and Miles Davis, and composers including Stravinsky and Steve Reich. *Hard Fairy* (1994) is a wonderful example of this genre-crossing in action, mixing minimalistic repetition with a block-like, Stravinskian approach to form that regularly thwarts our expectations. But against this hard-edged, tight-knit backdrop there is an overarching sense of freedom too, something that comes to the fore in the final coda where, Fitkin says, 'everything sits back and the whole business can be viewed from a different angle'.

© Jo Kirkbride 2021

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.