

WIGMORE HALL 125

Monday 6 October 2025
7.30pm

The Alchemy of Yearning

Hugo Ticciati violin, director

Anders Paulsson soprano saxophone

Sam Wilson percussion

O/Modernt Chamber Orchestra

Susanne von Gutzeit violin

Linda Suolahti violin

Emma Purslow violin

Anna Troxler violin

Eva Aronian violin

Annette Walther violin

Laura Lunansky violin

Sascha Bota viola

Daniel Eklund viola

Frauke Ticciati viola

Gordon Cervoni viola

Julian Arp cello

Claude Frochaux cello

Joseph Pritchard cello

Alexander Jones bass

Jordi Carrasco-Hjelm bass

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

Arvo Pärt (b.1935)

Osvaldo Golijov (b.1960)

Trad/Catalan

John Tavener (1944-2013)

Bryce Dessner (b.1978)

Arvo Pärt

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Vos flores rosarum arranged by Johannes Marmén

Fratres (1977)

Tenebrae (2002)

The song of the birds arranged by Pablo Casals

Interval

Mother of God, here I stand from 5 Anthems from The Veil of the Temple (1992, rev. 2002)

Aheym ('Homeward') (2009)

Silouan's Song 'My soul yearns after the Lord' (1991)

Grosse Fuge in B flat Op. 133 (1825-6)

Adagio for Strings (1936)



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The Alchemy of Yearning

Yearning comes in many guises, whether it is the impassioned desire for a loved one, the nostalgic longing for a lost home, or the irrepressible urge to escape human limitations. Purified in the crucible of art, however, yearning remains forever unsatisfied. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, it is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure because it epitomises the insatiable ache at the core of our being.

Vos flores rosarum by **Hildegard von Bingen** is a 12th-century responsory (a chant structured as statement and response), performed this evening in an instrumental arrangement. Fraught with spiritual complexity, the piece celebrates the deaths of martyrs, mingling the perfume of a rose with the redness of its petals – an image of Christ's blood and the foundational mystery of his death and resurrection. The music, freed from particular verbal constraints, conveys the synaesthetic fusion of scents and colours as a surging motion towards eternal peace.

Conversely, **Arvo Pärt's** infinity is encountered in elementary musical sounds: a three-note chord (a triad) produced with vibrating strings or a chiming bell that emit endlessly expanding overtones. More than mere physical motions, these reverberations are also extracts from an infinite mathematical set. *Fratres* exemplifies the *tintinnabuli* (bell-like) principle that summoned Pärt from his years of creative silence, when he spent seven years (1969-76) studying early Christian plainsong and Renaissance polyphony. Interposing melodic voices between notes from a shaping triad (an A minor chord), *Fratres* invokes the higher dimension that Pärt associates with God. The 'brothers' of the work's title recall the meditative seclusion of the cloister, but the word also invokes a trinity of dualisms: body and spirit; heaven and earth; time and eternity.

Oswaldo Golijov composed *Tenebrae* in 2002 as a reaction to violence in the Middle East (which rages incessantly today) and a visit to a planetarium in New York City with his son. The unlikely combination indicates a dual perspective. Viewed from afar, discord is resolved into musical form; look a little closer, and the illusion of serenity is shattered by brute reality. Musically, the work was inspired by *Tenebrae*, the liturgical service that takes place three days before Easter, when the lights in churches are slowly extinguished, leaving their congregations in darkness. And yet, the blackest night in the Church calendar heralds a new dawn, with Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday. As explored in Golijov's *Tenebrae*, a shift of perspective thus wrests hope from utter darkness.

The Song of the Birds is a traditional Catalan Christmas carol that **Pablo Casals** played as an encore at the end of every concert. Characterised by compassion and a reverence for the gift of life, the sweet noel depicts the Christ child being welcomed into the world by eagles, sparrows, nightingales and wrens.

The words of **Sir John Tavener's** 'Mother of God, here I stand' are taken from a prayer by the Russian Romantic

poet Mikhail Lermontov, in which the speaker expressly asks for nothing – neither forgiveness, nor salvation, nor intercession. All that remains is an inexhaustible desire for selfless adoration, personified in the innocent child for whose sake the prayer was composed. The piece forms part of Tavener's *The Veil of the Temple* – an all-night vigil that charts a journey towards God. Aiming to reconcile people of different faiths, the seven-hour epic fuses disparate sound worlds as an expression of the composer's belief in the essential oneness of humankind.

A musical evocation of ideas of flight and passage, **Bryce Dessner's** *Aheym* was inspired by the composer's fragmentary knowledge of his family's historical journey from Poland and Russia to America. The title, which means 'homeward' in Yiddish, was suggested by 'Di rayze aheym' ('The homeward journey') by the New York poet Irena Klepfisz, who writes: 'Among strangers is her home. Here, right here she must live. Her memories will become monuments.'

Profound humanity and the promise of salvation are the beating heart of **Arvo Pärt's** music. The overarching meaning is encapsulated in *Silouan's Song* – a wordless canticle triggered by the extempore verse of St Silouan, a figure with whom Pärt shares a special bond. Silouan retreated in 1892 to Mount Athos, living a life of unstinting asceticism and ceaseless prayer, while he created poetry infused with love and humility. He was also plagued with incurable headaches, but his supreme devotion was rewarded with a vision of Christ. Pärt sublimates Silouan's words, together with his pain and spiritual exaltation, into a musical shape that channels the ineffable longing expressed in the work's epigraph: 'My soul yearns after the Lord.'

Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* ('Great Fugue') was intended to be the final movement of his String Quartet No. 13, but the double fugue was so challenging for performers and listeners alike that it was eventually reworked as a self-contained blast against convention. Popularised in the Baroque period, a fugue introduces a subject that is passed between instruments (or hands on a keyboard), as it periodically returns in a range of guises (in full or in fragments, back to front or upside down, for example). A double fugue expands the argument by introducing two subjects, while Beethoven exponentially increases the complexity by filtering the fugal voices through contemporary musical structures, notably including sonata form. Exemplifying a Romantic ambition to tame the infinite, the Great Fugue is marked by a promethean struggle for sublime release.

This O/Modernt concert of yearnings concludes with **Barber's** *Adagio for Strings*, originally the second movement of his String Quartet No. 11, but later arranged for orchestra at the behest of Arturo Toscanini. Voted the 'saddest classical work ever', it is characterised by a tension that strains for a resolution that is never achieved – the quintessence of unsatisfied longing.

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