

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 7 September 2021 7.30pm

Lullabies and the Gods

Riot Ensemble

Sarah Saviet violin

Stephen Upshaw viola

Louise McMonagle cello

Joseph Houston piano

Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001)

Farzia Fallah (b.1980)

Errollyn Wallen (b.1958)

George Emanuel Lewis (b.1952)

Ikhoor (1978)

Lalayi II, a lullaby for Sohrab (2017)

Lavinia* (2021) *live performance première*

The Mangle of Practice (2014)

Interval

Bryn Harrison (b.1969)

Ailie Robertson (b.1983)

Peter Wilson (b.1990)

Enno Poppe (b.1969)

A Coiled Form* (2020) *world première*

Skydance (2020)

String Trio (2019)

Trauben (2004)

*Commission supported by the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation

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Long before completing his first string quartet, **Iannis Xenakis** was known for his monumental orchestral scores. Yet the intimacy of chamber music, something dear to Xenakis since childhood, provided the inspiration for a remarkable series of scores works for strings. *Ikhoor*, first performed by the Trio à Cordes Français in 1978, is among the most remarkable of all, its incessant energy determined by 'random paths', a mathematical concept central to Xenakis's mature work. The composition's title refers to 'the transparent, ethereal liquid that flows in the veins of the gods', a moving force embodied by the ceaseless ebb and flow of the music's rhythmic pulse. *Ikhoor*, like the deities of ancient Greece, veers between the predictable and the unpredictable, the random and the planned.

Raised in Tehran and resident in Germany since 2007, **Farzia Fallah** is blessed with a rare openness as composer and communicator. *Lalayi II, a lullaby for Sohrab* grows more from suggested fingerings than fixed pitches, although the score does indicate harmonics, glissandos and scordatura tunings and evokes moods with markings such as 'like a thousand shooting stars'. The work's engrossing textural contrasts are enhanced by multiphonics, the simultaneous sounding of several notes on the same string. Fallah prefaces her composition with Persian verse by Sohrab Sepehri (1928-80), among the finest of Iran's modern poets, taken from his poem 'To the garden of my fellow travellers', a lament for mankind's destruction of nature.

At the command of the aforementioned gods, the vanquished Trojan hero Aeneas leads his surviving comrades to a new home, an epic adventure recalled by Virgil in the *Aeneid*. Aeneas may be a man of destiny but, having abandoned the Carthaginian queen Dido to resume his divinely ordained odyssey, he proves an unreliable husband. In her opera *Dido's Ghost*, **Errollyn Wallen** views Aeneas from the perspective of his last wife, Lavinia, daughter of King Latinus. Lavinia, troubled by Aeneas's infatuation with Dido's sister, succumbs to jealous rage and the desire for revenge. Wallen revisits those emotions in a new solo piece for Stephen Upshaw, hair-raising in its intensity. *Lavinia*, she notes, 'seeks to convey the overwhelming and consuming nature of jealousy which most often grows out of pain at the prospect of loss'.

Every musician has experienced the demanding process inherent in the title of **George Emanuel Lewis**'s work for violin and piano. *The Mangle of Practice* embraces mangle's meaning as a device to squeeze water from washed clothes; it also draws inspiration from an essay by the sociologist Andrew Pickering, in which the author equates 'mangle' with the indeterminate ways in which humans interact with the material world, clashing with, resisting and accommodating what can and cannot be changed. Lewis tests the violinist's ability to overcome resistance with a series of gravity-defying high-wire acts, vertiginous harmonic arpeggios and glissandos.

A Coiled Form for solo violin was commissioned by its dedicatee Sarah Saviet with support from the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation. The piece reflects **Bryn Harrison**'s abiding interest in the aesthetics and ontology of musical time, not least in its recursive patterns of melodic loops and repeated individual notes, fractional elongations within a group of notes, and what the composer marks at his score's opening as a 'gradual, almost imperceptible rall[antando] to fine'.

Ailie Robertson's art is rooted in but not constrained by the diverse repertoires of Scottish and Irish traditional music. Born and raised in Edinburgh, she started playing harp as a child. After studying genetics at the University of Cambridge, Robertson spent a year at the Ireland World Academy of Music and Dance where she took to the Celtic harp, beguiled by its tonal beauty. Her compositions are informed by a profound feeling for the spirit of Celtic folk art and storytelling. *Skydance*, written during the first Covid pandemic lockdown and dedicated to Louise McMonagle, offers a meditation on the healing nature of sound in a world so suddenly awash with birdsong.

Since graduating from the Royal College of Music four years ago, the Australian composer **Peter Wilson** has built an impressive portfolio of work in theatre, film and the concert hall. His String Trio invites its audience 'to feel like voyeurs, listening in upon a private birdsong in the forest'. Just as birdsong moves freely in and out of consciousness, so Wilson's trio travels with ease between sound and silence. The use of practice mutes throughout and an overarching instruction for the players to fade in and out of each of the score's sound cells creates a sense of liminal space, gentle, beautiful, always in transition.

Among nature's countless miracles, those of plant growth often pass unnoticed. The process of development from seed and shoot follows mathematical patterns and scientific logic yet flourishes thanks to deviations and random departures from both. **Enno Poppe**'s approach to composition is informed by his fascination with organic structures and the ways in which they so often subvert the predictions of mathematical models. His piano trio *Trauben* ('Grapes') grows from the simplest of motivic cells, a repeated piano chord and a two-note string glissando, slowly fortified and transformed into a work of breathtaking complexity. Poppe plays with the contrasts between the chordal keyboard and the melodic violin and cello, before exploring their interdependence, like 'a molecule that consists of two atoms'.

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