

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 8 December 2021 7.30pm

VOCES8

Andrea Haines soprano
Molly Noon soprano
Katie Jeffries-Harris alto
Barnaby Smith alto, artistic director
Blake Morgan tenor
Euan Williamson tenor
Christopher Moore baritone
Jonathan Pacey bass
Manu Delago hangdrum

O/Modernt Chamber Orchestra

Hugo Ticciati violin, leader
Hannah Dawson violin
Siljamari Heikinheimo violin
Annette Walther violin
Tim Brackman violin
Laura Lunansky violin
Ariel Lang violin
Francis Kefford viola
Manuel Hofer viola
Julian Arp cello
Claude Frochoux cello
Jordi Carrasco-Hjelm double bass
Mark Tatlow organ

John Tavener (1944-2013)

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

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Magnificat RV610

Manu Delago (b.1984)

Wandering Around (2011)

Arvo Pärt (b.1935)

Nunc Dimittis (2001)

Interval

Arvo Pärt

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

Pēteris Vasks (b.1946)

Lonely Angel (1999 rev. 2006)

Sergey Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Bogoroditse Devo from *All-Night Vigil* Op. 37 (1915)

Manu Delago

Circadian (2019)

John Tavener

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Please note, the programme has changed slightly since these notes were written

The music that bookends today's concert - which is taken from **John Tavener's** *The Veil of the Temple* - is itself a kind of summation of the programme as a whole. They are both meditations on spirituality - not in a single, defined form, but in its many and varied guises, from recognised religions to the pure spirituality of humanity itself.

Tavener considered *The Veil of the Temple* 'the supreme achievement' of his life, not just for its monumental form (it lasts some seven hours and is designed to be performed through the night and into the dawn), but because of the way it transcends our traditional perceptions of spirituality. 'By the act of writing *The Veil* I understood that no single religion could be exclusive', Tavener explained. 'This tearing away of the Veil shows that all religions are in the transcendent way inwardly united beneath their outward form.' 'Mother of God, here I stand' is a setting of a prayer by the 19th-century Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, which Tavener treats with remarkable tenderness and simplicity. There is a plaintive, devotional stillness to his setting of the words, which ask not for forgiveness or salvation, but for selflessness and acceptance.

The Veil of the Temple came to be seen as the pinnacle of 'holy minimalism' - a spiritual complement to minimalism to which Tavener and his contemporaries Henryk Górecki and **Arvo Pärt** were somewhat unwittingly subscribed in the late 1970s. Although all three resisted the term, and they never intended to form a cohort of any sort, they are seemingly united by the luminous stillness of their works, by their distinct purity of texture, harmony and rhythm, and by the spiritual or mystical messages that their music explores. In his *Nunc Dimittis*, which Arvo Pärt composed some 12 years after his first setting of its 'partner piece', the *Magnificat*, Pärt's musical language seems to form a seamless blend with the serenity of the text. This is a canticle about salvation and light, and Pärt's setting builds through a sequence of gradually expanding phrases, tracking an exquisitely inexorable path from C sharp minor to the divine resplendence of C sharp major. Could it be a coincidence that just two years earlier, in neighbouring Latvia, **Pēteris Vasks** was exploring many of the same ideas too? Like Pärt, Vasks's music is rooted in a deep sense of spirituality, in the contrast between light and darkness, and in the fate of humanity. *The Lonely Angel* is a reworking of the fifth movement of his String Quartet No. 4 and was composed in response to a vivid vision Vasks experienced of an angel. He writes: 'The angel hovers over the world observing the state of the ravaged Earth with tears in his eyes, and yet an almost imperceptible, loving touch of his wings brings comfort and healing. This piece is a response to the pain.' This hovering and searching is made manifest in the meditative solo violin line, which seems to reach ever higher, grasping at something ethereal, while the earthy sounds of the orchestra murmur almost imperceptibly far below.

Although the 'holy minimalists' seemed to carve out a niche within the 20th-century musical landscape, one that was a direct reaction to the complexity and modernity of the 12-tone school, **Sergey Rachmaninov** could be found exploring many of the same ideas the best part of a century earlier. In 'Bogoroditse Devo' ('Rejoice, O Virgin') from his *All-Night Vigil* Op. 37 - which like Tavener's own all-night masterpiece is based around the Christian orthodox service - we hear the same hushed and slow-moving homophony, the same luminous clarity of texture, the subtle repetition of melodic motifs and restrained dynamics. It is utterly understated, and devastatingly emotive as a result.

Not all manifestations of spirituality have to be uttered in hushed, ethereal tones, of course. Where Tavener found quietude and resolution in *The Veil*, in his setting of the Magnificat **Antonio Vivaldi** turns to feelings of wonder and awe. Vivaldi composed his *Magnificat* RV610 in 1715 during his time at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, an orphanage that provided abandoned or unwanted children with shelter, education and extraordinary musical training. He would revise the work at least twice more, rescoring it for male chorus, changing the line-up of soloists, adding in new arias and adjusting the instrumentation - but throughout these revisions the work retained both its concision (it is little more than 15 minutes long) and its powerful sense of wonderment. From the broad homophony of the opening 'Magnificat' and closing 'Gloria' to the sheer ebullience of the 'Et exultavit', Vivaldi's setting is a glorious and unbridled celebration of the power and magnificence of the Lord.

As much as today's programme is a meditation on the transcendent and the otherworldly, it also touches upon the very earthly reality of being human. Today's guest soloist, **Manu Delago**, is a percussionist, composer and hangdrum virtuoso who has toured and collaborated with many of the world's leading jazz, pop and classical artists - a life that directly inspired his 2019 album *Circadian*. Rather like *The Veil of the Temple*, *Circadian* takes the listener on a musical journey through the night, in this case using the body's natural, circadian rhythms (and the interruptions to these rhythms that international touring can bring) as its foundations. Its title track *Circadian* is centred around a repeated 24-note pattern, which mimics our own 24-hour daily cycle. But as Delago explains, 'our 24-hour-rhythm is not perfect, and everyone has individual variations in their sleep pattern - in my own case often due to jetlag.' *Wandering Around* was composed a decade earlier during a month-long residency with Icelandic pop star Björk, and plays with rhythmic patterns in a very different way. It opens in something of a meditative, meandering haze, but as the bassline begins to anchor itself, a firm sense of propulsion gradually takes over - one that is visceral, instinctive and irresistibly upbeat.

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John Tavener (1944-2013)

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

Mikhail Lermontov

Mother of God, here I stand now praying,
Before this ikon of your radiant brightness,
Not praying to be saved from a battlefield;
Not giving thanks, nor seeking forgiveness
For the sins of my soul, nor for all the souls,
Numb, joyless and desolate on earth –
But for her alone, whom I wholly give you.

Mother of God, here I stand now praying,
Before this ikon of your radiant brightness,
Not praying to be saved from a battlefield;
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For the sins of my soul, nor for all the souls,
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But for her alone, whom I wholly give you.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Magnificat RV610

Liturgical text

| | |
|---|---|
| Magnificat anima mea Dominum. | My soul doth magnify the Lord. |
| Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo. | And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my savior. |
| Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae: | For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden; |
| Ecce enim ex hoc beatam Me dicent omnes generationes. | for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. |
| Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est: | For he that is mighty hath magnified me: |
| Et sanctum nomen ejus. | and holy is his name. |
| Et misericordia ejus a progenie in progenies timentibus eum. | And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations. |
| Fecit potentiam in brachio suo: | He hath showed strength with his arm; |
| Dispersit superbos mente cordis sui. | he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. |
| Deposuit potentes de sede, | He hath put down the mighty from their seat, |
| Et exaltavit humiles. | and hath exalted the humble. |
| Esurientes implevit bonis: | He hath filled the hungry with good things: |
| Et divites dimisit inanes. | and the rich he hath sent empty away. |
| Suscepit Israel puerum suum, Recordatus misericordiae suae. | He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel. |
| Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, | As he promised to our forefathers, |
| Abraham et semini ejus in saecula. | Abraham and his seed for ever. |

Gloria Patri et Filio, et Spiritui
Sancto:
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc,
et semper,
Et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Ghost,
as it was in the beginning, is
now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

Manu Delago (b.1984)

Wandering Around (2011)

Arvo Pärt (b.1935)

Nunc Dimittis (2001)

Liturgical text

Nunc dimittis servum tuum,
Domine, secundum verbum
tuum in pace:
Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare
tuum
Quod parasti ante faciem
omnium populorum:
Lumen ad revelationem
gentium, et gloriam plebis
tuae Israel.

Lord, now lettest thou thy
servant depart in peace:
according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen: thy
salvation,
Which thou hast prepared:
before the face of all people;
To be a light to lighten the
Gentiles: and to be the glory
of thy people Israel.

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui
Sancto:
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc,
et semper, et in saecula
saeculorum. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the
Son: and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and ever shall be: world
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Bogoroditse Devo from *All-Night Vigil Op. 37* (1915)

Liturgical text

Bogoroditse Devo, raduisya,
Blagodatnaya Mariye, Gospod s
toboyu.

Rejoice, virgin mother of God,
Mary, full of grace, the Lord is
with you.

Blagoslovena ty v zhenakh,
i blagosloven plod chreva
tvoego,
yako Spasa rodila yesi dush
nashikh.

Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your
womb,
for you have borne the Saviour
of our souls.

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