

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 8 July 2022 7.30pm

Explore Ensemble

Explore Ensemble is supported by the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung Ensemble Prize, and the Hinrichsen Foundation.

Taylor MacLennan flute

Ben Smith piano

Morag Robertson viola

Alex Roberts clarinet

David López Ibañez violin

Deni Teo cello

Siwan Rhys piano

Oscar Perks violin

Nicholas Moroz artistic director

CLASSIC *f*M

Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Enno Poppe (b.1969)

Gelöschte Lieder (1996-9)

Cassandra Miller (b.1976)

Perfect Offering (2020 rev. 2021)

Interval

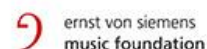
James Dillon (b.1950)

the soadie waste (2003)

Lawrence Dunn (b.1991)

Suite (2022) *world première*

Co-commissioned by Explore Ensemble and Wigmore Hall, with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, the Genesis Foundation's Kickstart Fund, PRS Foundation's Open Fund, and the RVW Trust.



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Tonight's concert presents a landmark programme from Explore Ensemble in its debut at Wigmore Hall – the ensemble's first major London appearance since winning the prestigious Ensemble Prize of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, and a celebration of the tenth anniversary of its formation at the Royal College of Music in 2012. It showcases the ensemble's virtuosic musicianship and vibrant curation across works by three generations of composers, reimagining both music itself and its relationship to the world in aesthetic landscapes that range from the brutal and bizarre to the joyous and cathartic.

The most mercurial textures and formal strategies come from the pen of **Enno Poppe**, whose habitual concern with the border between musical systems and their disintegration is evident in a work whose title means 'erased' or 'deleted songs'. 'Song' here is a metaphor for the various forms of stability which are encountered in the piece and are then disturbed or dissolved: the cyclical form suggested by the opening (in which a twofold thematic complex is repeated and varied in its entirety); long passages in which defined pitch reservoirs are rendered imperceptible by increasingly virtuosic figuration; the repeating one-bar pattern of the central intermezzo, loaded with more and more detail until it becomes a chaotic jumble which at the same time resembles a reprise of the opening section; or the subsequent Azerbaijani-style E flat clarinet melody which is repeated, exaggerated, and finally extinguishes itself.

If *Gelöschte Lieder* continually erases its own material and structures, each of the three remaining items in this evening's programme incorporates or refers to some different kind of music that exists before and outside it. Like much of **Cassandra Miller's** work, *Perfect Offering* draws on found sonic material – in this case, a recording of a peal of bells from a convent near Avignon in France. The piece emerged from a period of convalescence that overlapped with the early days of lockdown in spring 2020, and it became, says Miller, 'a meditation on the imperfect perfection of this tiring body and all the uselessness of plans'. The title (though none of the musical substance) comes from some lines of a Leonard Cohen song which Miller found herself remembering at this time: '*Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in.*'

Hence the bells. Slowing down the recording from the convent, Miller noticed new patterns emerging, not from the striking of the bells but from their resonances – hidden melodies that she could even sing along to, and that combined like interleaving lines in Renaissance polyphony. All of the music in *Perfect Offering* is derived from Miller's transcriptions of the bell recording, which is transformed through minutely close attention into something both other than and yet radically informed by what was present in the source. The instruments are seated in pairs – violin 1 with viola, flute with violin 2, clarinet with cello – each of which represents a

single bell, swinging with its own regular rhythm. The piano operates independently; its own giant, imperfect bell.

In contrast to Miller's deep contemplation of a single recorded source, **James Dillon's** piano quintet *the soadie waste* attests to an imaginative engagement with a whole genre of music and its associated social history. Subtitled 'wedding receptions, dances and housie-housie' (the latter phrase is another name for bingo), the piece alludes to activities that took place in the old Territorial Army social club in Rutherglen, on the outskirts of Dillon's native Glasgow. 'The soadie waste' was the nickname by which the club was known locally, being built on the site of an old chemical factory; according to Dillon, 'it is said that residual fumes from below would seep through the floorboards during a hot dance session'. Episodes clearly recalling bodily movement, grounded in the resonance of open strings and punctuated by the thick chords that ricochet back and forth between the four string instruments and the piano, alternate with more impressionistic, 'smeared' passages where, as in *Gelöschte Lieder*, something vivid seems to be dissolving and re-forming before our ears.

Lawrence Dunn's *Suite*, despite its seemingly abstract title, is deeply engaged with history and with the ways in which we organise our knowledge of the world. The work evokes the early modern era in which the form first developed, in a sectional structure alluding to a succession of historical styles (Renaissance polyphony, fauxbourdon, etc.). It also thereby engages with the fundamental idea of a suite as a series of generic containers, reflecting the way in which (not only in music) we divide up the world cognitively. 'Dividing up the world' takes on more sinister connotations when we remember that the suite's heyday was also the period of European colonial expansion – whose legacy is made explicit by the inclusion, as the second of three public-domain field recordings that are overlaid on the instrumental proceedings, of a recording of Surinamese schoolchildren singing their national anthem (in Dutch, the language of a country many of them may never even visit).

Unlike the bell recording underlying *Perfect Offering* – never heard directly yet generating all the musical content – Dunn's found materials cut across his composed music, directly influencing none of it yet crystallising its concerns with documentary immediacy. They are shards of reality, bearing witness to the world as it is and capturing, too, the way important history actually comes down to us, sedimented in the everyday present. Here no songs are deleted, but the world is exposed in all its complexity. A third recording, of fruit flies trapped in an empty wine bottle, suggests both the yearning for escape and the vast, almost incomprehensible scale of historical time in which we are all contained.

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