

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 8 March 2022 7.30pm

## WOMENS WORK

**Elaine Mitchener** vocalist

**Sarah Saviet** violin

**Mira Benjamin** violin

**Bridget Carey** viola

**Tamaki Sugimoto** cello

**Heather Roche** clarinet

**Siwan Rhys** piano

CLASSIC *f*M Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM

**Younghi Pagh-Paan** (b.1945)

ma-am (Mein Herz) (1990)

**Pamela Z** (b.1956)

Pop Titles 'You' (1986) *arranged by Elaine Mitchener*

**Alison Knowles** (b.1933)

#1 Shuffle (1961)

**Hannah Kendall** (b.1984)

Tuxedo: Between Carnival and Lent (2022) *world première*

**Tansy Davies** (b.1973)

Lullaby from *Cave* for mezzo-soprano and chamber ensemble (2018)

**Alison Knowles**

#7 Piece for Any Number of Vocalists (1962)

**Jennifer Walshe** (b.1974)

Something That Is Continuous (2021)

**Matana Roberts** (b.1975)

"Gasping for air considering your purpose Dissolving ..." (2020)

**Jeanne Lee** (1939-2000)

Subway Couple (1974)

**Younghi Pagh-Paan**

NOCH II (2012)

**Pauline Oliveros** (1932-2016)

The Inner/Outer Sound Matrix (2007)

*This evening's performance is followed by a post-concert talk*

Please note that some of these pieces contain adult content that may not be suitable for younger audiences

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*Womens Work* – Elaine Mitchener’s programme for this year’s International Women’s Day – takes place at a moment at which the body is in peril. Which body has the right to safety? Which one to protest without fear of reprisal? Which one to make sound and to be listened to? These are some of the areas that this exhilarating and provocative programme addresses.

It is apt that Mitchener takes as her title one that was supplied in 1975 by a magazine of 25 text scores compiled by the composer Annea Lockwood and Fluxus artist Alison Knowles. Just as the first *Womens Work* highlighted a cluster of women artists whose work refused any clear boundaries, so does this programme, with Mitchener herself an artist whose own work avoids neat categorisations. Her experimental approaches to singing, movement and composition constitute an assemblage of so many creative possibilities.

*Pop Titles 'You'* (**Pamela Z**, arr. **Mitchener**) was originally a work for multitracked voice, with Z reading pop song titles from the *Phonolog Report*, a catalogue that listed all the records available to buy. Many of these songs include the word 'you' in their titles, and their accumulation creates an emotive text. Mitchener’s version, for acoustic ensemble, keeps the rhythms created by the iteration of the 'you', but here, the repeated pronoun has the effect of directly connecting performer and audience. It sets the scene for positioning the audience as sonic witnesses to what is to come.

This is most strongly felt in **Matana Roberts**’s *"Gasping for air considering your purpose Dissolving..."* (for *E. Mitchener*). One of three new works written for Mitchener and presented this evening, this is a conceptual score based on the writings of the Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter and Fluxus composer Ben Patterson. Using breathing sounds and silence, Roberts witnesses those Black lives destroyed by police brutality. Dedicated to the memories of Rodney King, and so many more, Roberts sent her score to Mitchener a day before George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis. As visceral as one canonical work against racism, Steve Reich’s *Come Out* (1966), *"Gasping..."* reminds us that the freedom that we celebrate on International Women’s Day is far from universal.

Life experience – this time, grief – features strongly in *ma-am* (*Mein Herz*), one of two compositions in this programme by the South Korean composer **Younghi Pagh-Paan**. For female voice, Pagh-Paan wrote it for Nuria Schoenberg-Nono, following the death of her husband, the composer Luigi Nono. Setting a 16th-century poem by Jeong Cheol (it contains the startling line, 'I want to tear my heart out...'), Pagh-Paan moves from a traditional Korean rhythmical structure to the creation of a circular work with minimal percussion that Mitchener sees as fulfilling a call-and-response action, a process akin to African diasporic music. *NOCH II* sets a Rose Ausländer poem in a space which pulls the expressive capacity of words into new territories.

Loss is also central to 'Lullaby', which its composer **Tansy Davies** has rearranged for ensemble and Mitchener’s alto voice. 'Lullaby' comes from Davies’s performance work *Cave*, a story of a bereaved father’s search for his daughter, a climate change activist, in a post-apocalyptic world that has been ravaged by the effects of climate emergency. Mitchener, who sang the daughter role at its world première in London, sees the song as about comfort, grief and above all, connection.

Human connection, in its many facets, is central to this programme. We see it writ large in the most political works (those of Roberts and Z) but also on the smaller scale. **Jeanne Lee**’s *Subway Couple* is an acute commentary on relationships, its lyrics a cool observation of the power dynamics between a couple, man and woman, glimpsed in a single moment. Two event scores from **Alison Knowles** – *#1 Shuffle* and *#7 Piece for Any Number of Vocalists* – focus on the relationship between performer and audience. *#1 Shuffle* does this explicitly, constituting a Fluxus performance artwork. (That *#1 Shuffle* is positioned next to Z’s *Pop Titles* underlines the responsibility of the listener to be an active witness.) *#7*, which asks each performer to think of their own song and then sing it, is, in Mitchener’s view, 'an exercise in focusing and not being pulled apart by other songs'. It is an apt metaphor for a communal celebration of difference.

A playful approach to improvisation and notation appears in another work created for Mitchener: **Hannah Kendall**’s *Tuxedo: Between Carnival and Lent*. For voice and ensemble (this latter including violins and musical boxes), *Tuxedo*’s libretto is drawn from newspaper headlines, Biblical phrases and text from Jean-Michel Basquiat’s 1982 graffiti screen-print of the same name. Like Basquiat’s artwork, Kendall’s *Tuxedo* is a re-composition of disparate elements as well as a refusal to play a game of hierarchies between 'high' culture instruments, and the 'low' culture represented by tinny musical boxes playing phrases from famous classical works. Mitchener’s own artistic fluidity is reflected in **Jennifer Walshe**’s *Something That Is Continuous*. Originally performed by countertenor and Baroque instruments, this is an open score; Mitchener uses voice and open instrumentation as a way of creating a dialogue between old and new, thereby facilitating a translation between two modalities.

No programme for International Women’s Day would be complete without the inclusion of **Pauline Oliveros**, feminist, pioneering composer and formulator of Deep Listening. *The Inner/Outer Sound Matrix* asks that a reader select a text of contemporary relevance and then express a chosen phrase or word aloud. Whatever Mitchener chooses, we can be sure that it will encapsulate so much of what she believes is fundamental to this programme of work: community, joy, and the possibility that art might effect change.

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## Younghi Pagh-Paan (b.1945)

**ma-am (Mein Herz)** (1990)

*Jeong Cheol trans. Alexandra Yu*

I want to tear out my heart  
And put it up as the moon.  
I would hang it just right  
Into the endless deep sky,  
So that it can shine its light  
On the one I love.

## Pamela Z (b.1956)

**Pop Titles 'You'** (1986)

arranged by Elaine Mitchener

## Alison Knowles (b.1933)

**#1 Shuffle** (1961)

## Hannah Kendall (b.1984)

**Tuxedo: Between Carnival and Lent** (2022) *world première*

*Newspaper headlines, liturgical text, 'Tuxedo' by Jean-Michael Basquiat*

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened

Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none.

Water will gush forth into the wilderness  
The burning sand will become a pool.

Plains Region Unfit for Plow, Survey Shows

Refugees From Dust Bowl Seeking New Farms in West Create National Problem

You

Dust Bowl By Bryant Putney The Problem of Reconstruction  
Dust...

...Bowl Staging Comeback  
Life Renewed in Dust Bowl

Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none

Life...

Renewed In Dust Bowl...The Drought Area is Fertile Again

The water saw you and writhed;

Showers in Northeast Cheer Farmers of New Dust Bowl

The clouds poured down water

There's No More Dust in Kansas Dust Bowl

Your lightning lit up the world,  
You led your people like a flock  
Flashed

Despair, you farmers, wail you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree - all the trees of the field - are dried up. Surely the people's joy is withered away?

## Tansy Davies (b.1973)

**Lullaby from Cave for mezzo-soprano and chamber ensemble** (2018)

*Nick Drake*

Hush, don't cry, don't cry  
In the house of the dark ...

*Due to copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the full text of the above song*

## Alison Knowles

**#7 Piece for Any Number of Vocalists** (1962)

## Jennifer Walshe (b.1974)

**Something That Is Continuous** (2021)

## Matana Roberts (b.1975)

**"Gasping for air considering your purpose Dissolving ..."** (2020)

**Jeanne Lee** (1939-2000)

**Subway Couple** (1974)

He,  
    very black  
        and very  
vital; ...

*Due to copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the full text of the above song*

**Younghi Pagh-Paan**

**NOCH II** (2012)

*after Rose Ausländer*

Placed variable  
In time  
Which designates names  
Uninhibited words  
Forgotten  
Unthought

Yet another line  
Another word  
Another syllable  
Another letter  
Another period

My forebearers  
Were without blame  
I inherited the dew  
Of their tears

The world  
Is giving me  
A secret sign  
And bids farewell

I answer  
Goodbye

**Pauline Oliveros** (1932-2016)

**The Inner/Outer Sound Matrix** (2007)