

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 8 March 2025
7.30pm

Caroline Shaw, Wigmore Hall Composer in Residence

Composer in Residence is supported by Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne

Caroline Shaw composer, singer

Gabriel Kahane composer, singer, piano

Patrick Allies director

Siglo de Oro

Ailsa Campbell soprano

Fiona Fraser soprano

Rachel Haworth soprano

Rebekah Jones alto

Katherine Nicholson alto

Anna Semple alto

Paul Bentley-Angell tenor

Chris Fitzgerald-Lombard tenor

Oscar Golden-Lee tenor

David Le Prevost bass

Sam Mitchell bass

Ben Rowarth bass

Caroline Shaw (b.1982)

Fly Away I (2012)

and the swallow (2017)

Dolce Cantavi (2015)

How to fold the wind (2020)

I. In the Beginning • II. In Creases •

III. Inhale • IV. In Waves •

V. In Parallel

Interval

Gabriel Kahane (b.1981) & Caroline Shaw

Hexagons (2025)

Commissioned by Newman Center for the
Performing Arts, San Francisco
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Duke Arts, Philharmonie de Paris,
Philharmonic Society of Orange County,
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Plus additional works to be announced from the stage

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Caroline Shaw has been composing short choral pieces along the way all the while. This selection begins with the earliest she has published, *Fly Away I* (2012), which characteristically draws deep from the American vernacular and at the same time floats free. The original Gospel song, 'I'll Fly Away', was written in 1929 by Albert E. Brumley (1905-77), who began life on his family's tenant cotton farm in Oklahoma. In Shaw's version, simple words become strange pronouncements and standard harmonies slip and slide. The hymn is refracted and finally restored.

In *and the swallow* (2017) Shaw set verses from Psalm 84 to music that is plain yet luminous, with diatonic lines often rising and a startling change of key. Repetitions reinforce a sense of closeness. Shaw chose this text, she has said, thinking of the Syrian refugee crisis. According to UN figures, 11 million people fled Syria in the first half of 2017.

From the full eight-part choir of this last piece we move to three women's voices singing *Dolce cantavi* (2015). At the same time, home base shifts, from American hymns and psalms to Italian madrigals from the twilight of the Golden Age. The words are by Francesca Turini Bufalini (1553-1641), a noblewoman who, at the age of 21, married a count almost 50 years her senior. She devoted the last two decades of her long widowhood to preparing her poems for publication as *Rime* (1628), including the sonnet 'Vago augellin'. Shaw, in her replacement title, draws attention to the act of singing, while in her setting she seems occasionally to glance across to her poet's near contemporary Carlo Gesualdo.

Shaw has said that the basic image in her mind for *How to Fold the Wind* (2020) was that of origami, the Japanese art of folding a piece of paper so as to come up with an intricate three-dimensional meshing of small planar surfaces suggesting, perhaps, an animal. Here are five shapes made out of thin air - of the air the singers breathe out and breathe in, five lessons in how to fold the wind.

The first begins as a folding of words and vowel sounds, among which the words deliver an instruction they seem themselves to be obeying: 'with a square folded in half a piece to form begin'. Soon there duly flowers from this a chord of C minor, preparing us for music swept by gentle consonances within a much wider space of sound. Most immediately, the folding and unfolding continue.

Something that is folded in space - a sheet of origami paper, as it might be - becomes smaller. Something that is folded in time - in the way that Shaw does this, by way of repetitions bouncing among the voices - becomes larger. Or to put it another way: a folding in creases increases. Hence, the title of the second movement, where a rhyme dissolves into vowel sounds.

Conversely, verbal phrases form themselves here and there in the scat-scherzo-with-counting-song that is the third movement.

Slow undulations of open fifths and triads open the fourth movement and support its more active material. The finale then retraces elements of what has gone before, bringing them into the light.

After the interval, Caroline Shaw and **Gabriel Kahane** present their new work *Hexagons*, loosely based on Jorge Luis Borges's story *The Library of Babel*, which was published in the original Spanish in 1941 and in English in 1962. The story concerns an infinite library whose hexagonal rooms give access to others adjacent or on further floors. Each of the infinite books, all of them the same size, is composed with an identical set of 22 letters following one another at random. A very large proportion of the books will therefore contain nothing but nonsense. Some, however, will convey existing texts. All the books of the Bible will be here, and Shakespeare, and Proust, and so on. Also, these will be present in innumerable translations, known and unknown. Furthermore, all the books that have yet to be written by human authors will be somewhere in this endless labyrinth.

Borges did not conceal that his source was Kurd Lasswitz's *The Universal Library* (1904), in a tradition going back to the pre-Socratic philosophers Democritus and Leucippus. Perhaps he wanted to feel his story touched infinity not only in what it told but also in how it retold, and he might have been glad to know how its ramifications go on.

Shaw and Kahane first worked together in 2011, with Shaw as violinist in one of Kahane's performances. The idea of a much closer collaboration came a decade or so later and resulted in tonight's piece, which they first performed three months ago at the Patricia Reser Center for the Arts in the Portland suburb of Beaverton.

'Gabe and I both had wanted to make something about this story,' Shaw has said, 'and we decided to come together. There's a mix of songs ... and with a viola, and piano, and our voices, and a little bit of electronics, and a loop pedal, we're constructing a world that doesn't really tell the story of the Library of Babel, but maybe hints at the colors of the world that Borges constructs.'

Kahane adds: 'It's impossible to read the story in the 21st century without seeing the library as a metaphor for the internet age. But I don't think either of us could have anticipated the extent to which Borges' animating premise would resonate with our increasingly vexed information landscape.'

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Caroline Shaw (b.1982)

Fly Away I (2012)

“When I die hallelujah by and
by
I’ll fly away”

I went the way the way the
way I went
the way the way the
way the way the way I went

where you are

and the swallow (2017)

Liturgical text

How beloved is your
dwelling place, O Lord of
hosts,
My soul yearns, faints, my
heart and my flesh cry.
The sparrow found a house
and the swallow, her nest,
Where she may raise her
young.
They pass through the valley
of bakka,
They make it a place of
springs.
The autumn rains also cover
it with pools.

Dolce Cantavi (2015)

Francesca Turina Bufalini

Vago augellin, che per quei rami ombrosi dolce cantavi a minüir mie pene, di sentirti al mio cor gran desir viene per fare in tutto i giorni miei giocosi.	Lovely little bird, who, among those shady branches, used to sing so sweetly to mitigate my sorrows, a great desire comes to my heart to hear you again, to make my days complete in their joy.
Deh vieni, e teco mena i più famosi cantor che quella selva in sen ritiene, ché goderete in queste rive amene, ed a l'estivo di starete ascosi.	Come, and bring with you the most famous singers that the forest nurtures in its breast, for you will have the pleasure of these fair waters and be hidden away from the heat of the summer day.

Il boschetto vi attende, e 'l bel giardino là dove in fra le fronde e l'onda e l'ora gareggian mormorando a me vicino.	The little wood awaits you, and the lovely garden where, among the leaves, the ripples and the breeze compete in their murmuring beside me.
A cantar sorgeremo in sul mattino: io con le Muse invocarò l'aurora, e voi col vostro gorgheggiar divini.	We will rise together before sunrise: I will herald the dawn with the Muses, and you with your warbling divine.

How to fold the wind (2020)

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Gabriel Kahane (b.1981), Caroline Shaw

Hexagons

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