

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Blue Now

Sun 1 Dec 2024
Queen Elizabeth Hall

Blue was Derek Jarman's final film, completed shortly before his death in 1994. A single unchanging shot of celestial blue is accompanied by a kaleidoscopic soundtrack of voices and music in which we hear Jarman reflecting on his own AIDS-related illnesses, on his mortality and on loved ones lost to the virus. As AIDS progressively steals his sight, he searches for a vision that 'transcends the solemn geography of human limits'.

The voices on the original soundtrack of the film were those of three of Jarman's close friends and colleagues – Nigel Terry, John Quentin and Tilda Swinton – and that of Jarman himself. For this live iteration of the film, which we are calling *Blue Now*, the words are delivered by Travis Alabanza, Jay Bernard, Joelle Taylor and Russell Tovey. They speak within and across an improvised soundscape, created live by Simon Fisher Turner, the film's original composer, playing with cellist and composer Lucy Railton.

Forty years after the film was first released, we hope that this World Aids Day performance of *Blue Now* provides an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the AIDS epidemic, and on the importance of creating space for compassion, rage and poetry in the face of prejudice and oppression.

Blue Now is directed by Neil Bartlett, and produced by James Mackay.

Biographies

Derek Jarman (1942 – 1994) was an English artist, filmmaker, stage designer, diarist, author and gardener. He was educated at King's College London and the Slade School of Art. In the early 1970s Jarman began an extensive series of film works made with Super 8mm, followed by his first feature film, *Sebastiane*, in 1975. He then went on to make ten feature films. *Blue* was first shown at the Biennale Arte, Venice in 1993.

Neil Bartlett's forty years of performance-making as a director, author and performer includes work for the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court and the Royal Vauxhall Tavern. Most recently, he provided the script for Emma Corrin's re-incarnation of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* in the West End of London. His books include the novels *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*, *The Disappearance Boy* and *Address Book*. In 2018, he wrote the introduction for the paperwork re-issue of Derek Jarman's final volume of diaries, *Smiling in Slow Motion*.

Simon Fisher Turner is renowned for his film soundtrack work which started with Derek Jarman, for whom he scored many feature films – from *Caravaggio* (1986), through to Jarman's final work, *Blue* (1993). Working with the BFI, Fisher Turner composed the scores for restorations of three silent films,

Un Chant D'Amour, dir. Jean Genet (1950), *The Great White Silence*, dir. Herbert Ponting (1924) and *The Epic of Everest*, dir. Captain John Noel (1924), for which he won a prestigious Ivor Novello Award. He has also composed film music for Mike Hodges, Michael Almareyda, Isao Yamada. He has released records under his own name and as The King Of Luxembourg and Deux Filles.

Lucy Railton is a British cellist and composer whose work bridges experimental electronic and electroacoustic practices within the conventions of new music. She has performed in a variety of contexts since graduating from the Royal Academy of Music in 2008; composed for installations at the Tate Modern and the ICA; collaborated with electronic producers Peter Zinovieff and Beatrice Dillon; interpreted solo and chamber music works by Morton Feldman, Iannis Xenakis and Catherine Lamb; and appeared on recordings by Ellen Arkbro, Laurel Halo and many others. She currently performs with Soundwalk Collective and Patti Smith, and Stephen O'Malley and Kali Malone.

Travis Alabanza is a writer, performer and theatre-maker from Bristol whose writing, performance and public discourse centres on trans and Black identities. Alabanza has written, toured and performed in numerous highly-regarded shows and is currently developing projects for screen. Their debut book, *None of the Above: Reflections on Life Beyond the Binary*, was published in 2022.

Jay Bernard (FRSL, FRSA) is an interdisciplinary writer and artist from London whose work is rooted in social histories. Bernard was named Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year 2020 and winner of the 2017 Ted Hughes Award for their first collection, *Surge*. Recent work includes *My Name is My Own*, a physical performance piece in response to June Jordan premiered at the Southbank Centre's Poetry International; *Joint*, a poetic-play about the history of joint enterprise; *Crystals of this Social Substance*, a sound installation at the Serpentine pavilion; and *Complicity*, a pamphlet based on the collection at the Tate. Bernard was a 2022 – 2023 DAAD literature fellow in Berlin.

Joelle Taylor is the author of four collections of poetry. Her most recent collection *C+NTO & Othered Poems* won the 2021 TS Eliot Prize, and the 2022 Polari Book Prize for LGBT authors. *C+NTO* is currently being adapted for theatre with a view to touring. She is a co-curator and host of *Out-Spoken* at the Southbank Centre, and tours her work nationally and internationally. She is also a Poetry Fellow of University of East Anglia and the curator of the Koestler Awards 2023. Her novel of interconnecting stories *The Night Alphabet* was published by Riverrun in Spring of 2024 and was named Guardian Book of the Month. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and the 2022 Saboteur Spoken Word Artist of the Year. She was recently honoured with a DIVA Award for Excellence and was also included in the *Independent's* 2024 Pride Power list.

Russell Tovey is an award-winning British actor with an extensive background in film, television and theatre. He is also a passionate art collector and co-hosts art podcast *Talk Art* with friend and gallerist Robert Diament, in which they interview leading artists, curators, gallerists and celebrities. Their first book *Talk Art: Everything You Wanted To Know About Contemporary Art But Were Afraid To Ask* has been listed as one of *The Sunday Times's* Top Ten Bestsellers, and their second book will be released soon. In 2023, Russell was announced as the WePresent Guest Curator, working with them on two film projects about Derek Jarman and David Robilliard, respectively.

Blue Now, in this live event version, was commissioned by WePresent for WeTransfer, first presented by WeTransfer in association with Fuel and Basilisk Communications, and originally produced by Fuel.