

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Matthew Barley: Light Stories

Saturday 28 September 2024, 5.30pm & 9.30pm

Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

Classical music has always had reinvention at its core. Throughout our programme, we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – capture that trailblazing spirit with works that broke the mould across the ages and brand-new approaches to timeless classics.

However you choose to experience the endlessly inventive world of classical music, we're so glad that you're doing it here with us. Welcome to Classical Music: Autumn/Winter 2024/25.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

**Part 1** Introduction, and dreaming of a future, naively, from those places in my childhood that were often murky and mysterious, and setting out, nevertheless, full of the confidence of youth.

Matthew Barley Spell	2'
Matthew Barley The Dreaming	5'
Matthew Barley Cathedrals and Caves	6'
Bach Prelude from Suite No.6 in D for solo cello, BWV1012	5'

**Part 2** The journey begins, meetings with strange beings, foreign lands, brushing with danger, wide-eyed and adolescent.

Jan Bang Implanted Memories	3'
Giovanni Sollima Hell 1 from Songs from the Divine Comedy	5'
Anna Meredith moonmoons	5'
Anna Meredith Blackfriars	3'

**Part 3** Beginning with unease, danger mounts until the moment of greatest jeopardy arrives, with a classic narrow escape from death as everything falls apart.

Matthew Barley Unravelling	5'
Joby Talbot Motion Detector	6'
Matthew Barley In the Crosshairs	3'
Matthew Barley Timefolding	2'

**Part 4** Healing takes place in the spirit realm as well as the body, heart and mind.

John Metcalfe Constant Filter	7'
Matthew Barley Full, Empty	3'

**Part 5** With the wisdom gained from life's lessons, returning home in peace for a celebration and dance.

Matthew Barley The Unwaiting Sky	11'
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**Performer** Matthew Barley *cello*

**Credits**  
Yeast Culture *video design*  
Tim Grabham *animation and art design*  
Nick Hillel *video design producer*  
MJ Holland *video programmer and show operator*  
Will Good *live sound engineer*  
Mavin Khoo *on-screen dancer*

*Light Stories* was born from a wish to tell a personal story in sound and image: the tale of a near-tragic event in my teenage years when I attempted to take my own life during a psychotic episode brought on by a drug overdose, and the subsequent healing through music and therapy.

I had been wanting to compose for many years and this presented itself as an ideal vehicle for this new aspect of being a musician. The music is almost all for multi-tracked cellos, but there are also synthesizer sounds, percussion, keyboards and a collection of Brazilian birdcall pipes.

*The Seven Basic Plots* by Christopher Booker outlines the archetypal tales we tell ourselves, and one of them, 'Voyage and Return', resonated especially, so I divided up my life story into 15 parts, giving each part a sentence or two to sum it up. I then matched pieces from my repertoire to these chapters, and where there was no existing work, I wrote something.

Yeast Culture's video design also features Mavin Khoo dancing, bringing a human element to the wide range of often nature-inspired imagery.

**Programme note** © Matthew Barley, 2024

Each performance lasts approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes without an interval.

Matthew Barley has selected existing compositions to sit alongside his own works to match the stages of his *Light Stories*. **Joanna Wyld** takes a look at the pieces which complement Barley's own works.

In his six cello suites, **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)** achieved the apparently miraculous feat of using an individual instrument to create the impression of counterpoint, often in three or four parts. The works are dated c.1717–23, when Bach was working at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, although some may have been written slightly earlier. Bach was an accomplished cellist – and the Prince a capable viola da gamba player – but he would also have worked alongside the likes of exceptional cellists Christian Ferdinand Abel and Christian Linigke, for whom the suites may have been composed.

According to Bach's first biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Bach was interested in developing a cello-like instrument that would be deep in register without taking a continuo role (outlining a bass-line alongside a keyboard instrument). Forkel wrote in 1782: 'Mr. Joh. Seb. Bach invented an instrument that he called viola pomposa. It is tuned like a violoncello but has one string more at the top, is somewhat larger than a viola, and is so attached with a ribbon that it can be held on the arm in front of the chest.'

In some sources, the Suite No.6 in D, BWV.1012 is written 'à cinq cordes', so it may have been composed for this five-stringed instrument or for a violoncello piccolo (a smaller cello, also with five strings), although it is more usually performed on a modern cello. This sixth and last of the suites breathes pastoral charm, covering a wider range of pitches than the earlier suites, and with a greater degree of freedom and improvisatory virtuosity. The work is set in motion by a genial 'Prelude' replete with echo effects.

**Jan Bang (b. 1968)** is a Norwegian musician and record producer who pioneered the technique of 'live sampling' and has collaborated with artists from David Sylvian of Japan to Morten Harket of A-ha, alongside a career that embraces electronica and jazz. The dream-like *Implanted Memories* features orchestral samples by the Japanese composer Dai Fujikura (b. 1977), with whom Bang joined forces to create the musically fluid, shape-shifting album *The Bow Maker*.

Italian composer and cellist **Giovanni Sollima (b. 1962)** has been broadly categorised as a 'postminimalist' artist, on account of a style that encompasses minimalism alongside a diverse range of influences, such as jazz, rock and authentic Mediterranean folk. Sollima's collaborations include work with Patti Smith, and with the Silkroad project, a not-for-profit organisation established by cellist Yo-Yo Ma that promotes multicultural artistic exchange. Sollima's love of literature is evident from the wide-ranging sources with which he has worked, including texts by Dylan Thomas, Ernest Hemingway and Goethe, and it was Dante who inspired his *Songs from The*

*Divine Comedy*. Alongside songs for voice and chamber ensemble, the set features the haunting 'Hell 1' for solo cello and electronics.

Described as 'one of the most innovative minds in modern British music' (*Pitchfork*), Scottish composer **Anna Meredith (b. 1978)** is a musical polymath whose output defies easy categorisation, her work spanning acoustic and electronic music in an eclectic array of styles and media. From Meredith's album *FIBS*, 'moonmoons' (2019) combines electronics with live performance to represent 'moons of moons': 'this idea of intergalactic worlds within worlds and of doubling and playing with scale, of zooming in and out is explored right through the piece'. Composed during a vulnerable time in her life, Meredith's 'Blackfriars' (2016) is the last track on her album *Varmints*, in which context it makes for a gentle epilogue. Of the piece, she explained: 'I was trying to work that one out while not being able to access the normal skills I needed in order to compose, not being able to tap into the strength that I needed, and that's what came out.'

In *Motion Detector* (2005) by the versatile British composer **Joby Talbot (b. 1971)**, cello loops of increasing intensity are heard against the backdrop of an ascending choral glissando. The choral sample used is a version of the *Pasiputput*, the sacred song of the indigenous Bunun tribe of Taiwan. This prayer for the successful millet harvest is said to evoke the hum of bees or the rush of waterfalls.

**John Metcalfe (b. 1964)**, composer and violist with the Duke Quartet, has recorded with a remarkable variety of artists – including Matthew Barley, for whom he composed an album of electro-acoustic music. Barley said of his friend's output: 'Metcalfe's music fascinates me: it intelligently fuses acoustic and electronic soundworlds; it develops its themes with economic clarity; and – the main attraction – it speaks to the heart without ignoring the head.' Barley commissioned a piece from Metcalfe in 2006, having listened avidly to his first album. In due course, *Constant Filter* arrived in the post, and Barley was struck by this ethereal work and its 'emotional impact... both honest and innovative: it was original, sophisticated and immediate – not an easy combination to find.' He particularly values Metcalfe's mix of 'the acoustic cello sound and those other-worldly electronic pulses that hover and fly around the second half of the piece.'

**Programme note © Joanna Wyld, 2024**

*Light Stories* was produced with the support of The Nicholas Berwin Charitable Trust and the Southbank Centre, and first performed at the Southbank Centre

#### Find out more

- ▶ Matthew Barley
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](https://southbankcentre.co.uk)

## You might also like...

### Lawrence Power's Lock-in

Saturday 9 November 2024, 8pm | Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

Live music meets pre-recorded material in a boundary-pushing experience from Resident Artist Lawrence Power, with guests Héloïse Werner and Sergio Bucheli.