

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Ben Goldscheider & Philip Dawson: Horn & Electronics

Thursday 27 June 2024, 6.30pm

Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

Classical music is an incredible, centuries-long story. As we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – share that story with the world today, we're creating as many ways for as many different people as possible to experience this wonderful art form.

Whether this is your first encounter with classical music or one of many, I'm absolutely thrilled that you're joining us for more powerful human experiences. Welcome to Classical Music: Spring/Summer 2024.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Alex Groves *Single Form (Dawn)* for horn & live electronics 9'

Zoë Martlew *Nibiru* for horn & live electronics (World premiere) 8'

Hildegard Westerkamp *Fantasie* for horns II 13'

Thea Musgrave *Golden Echo III* for horn & live electronics (World premiere) 12'

Mark Simpson *Darkness Moves II* for horn & live electronics (World premiere) 8'

Performers

Ben Goldscheider *horn*

Philip Dawson *live electronics*

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour. There is no interval.

Development of this concert was supported by the staff and facilities of the sound studios at City, University of London's Department of Performing Arts.

Alex Groves (b.1991)

Single Form (Dawn) for horn & live electronics (2022)

Today's concert blending, colliding and contrasting the richness of the French horn with the sonic imaginativeness of electronics opens with a recent piece by London-born and -based composer Alex Groves. He has worked across both acoustic classical and electronic musics, and has often melded traditional instruments and live-processed electronic soundscapes, sometimes making it difficult to tell the two apart. He wrote *Single Form (Dawn)* in 2022 for Ben Goldscheider, who premiered it at that year's *sound festival* in Aberdeen. Groves writes about the piece:

'*Single Form (Dawn)* is a slow-motion, sonic sunrise. Starting in the murky depths of the muted horn, it gradually unfurls up the harmonic series until it ends in a wall of radiant light. The piece revolves around the harmonic series on the fundamental of the horn in F. At first, these notes are condensed into their lowest octave, creating a dense and brooding soundworld. As the piece

develops, the notes are gradually spread across the first three octaves of the harmonic series. By the end, the sound created feels simultaneously "wrong" and "right", with the natural tunings in the harmonic series playing with our expectations as to what is and isn't in tune.'

Single Form (Dawn) was commissioned with support from the Marchus Trust.

Zoë Martlew (b.1968)

Nibiru for horn & live electronics (World premiere)

Zoë Martlew is something of a polymath and certainly a genre-straddler: she works across several artistic disciplines as a composer, cellist, cabaret artist, teacher, curator and more, and she's appeared worldwide across classical music, improvisation, rock and electronica, as well as in dance and theatre productions. She has even hosted podcasts and TV shows, as well as teaching internationally. She writes about her new piece:

'The Nibiru cataclysm is a supposed disastrous encounter between Earth and a large planetary object prophesied to take place in the early 21st century, a topic explored in depth through ancient Babylonian mythology by Sumerian academic Zecharia Sitchin. Believers in this doomsday event refer to the offending planetary object as Nibiru or "Planet X". In 2015, Caltech astronomers found mathematical evidence suggesting that such a planet may indeed exist deep in our solar system...

'Rich fuel for sonic drama, my take on this fabulous space legend opens with nuclear armageddon, while the solo horn, harbinger of apocalypse, calls to the heavens for the salvation of humanity. Prayers for world peace (including real-life clips from the Dalai Lama, prayers in Ukrainian, Hebrew, Celtic, Sanskrit and from Aboriginal and Hopi tribes) are offered up, as the sole survivor (luckily carrying a French horn) rockets into the vast unknowns of deep space. From the depths of shifting dimensional awareness, a new Eden emerges, represented here by the last known recording of a male Kaua'i 'ō'ō bird in Hawaii, calling for a mate that never came...'

Commissioned for *Camerata Pacifica* by Judith Vida-Spence in memory of her late husband Stuart Spence.

Hildegard Westerkamp (b.1946)

Fantasia for Horns II (1979)

Born in Germany but resident in Canada since 1968, Hildegard Westerkamp has been deeply immersed in soundscape composition and acoustic ecology: the sounds of the environment, and how to listen to them and create within them. Many of her works have drawn on the sounds of urban or wilderness landscapes, the voices of people and animals, noise and music from cultures worldwide. She writes:

'*Fantasia for Horns II* was composed in two stages: the soundtrack was completed first, in 1978, and was conceived as a composition in its own right (*Fantasia for Horns I*, which received honourable mention at the 1979 International Competition of Electroacoustic Music in Bourges, France). After the completion of the soundtrack, it seemed natural to add a live horn part. Besides being environmental in its choice of sounds, the soundtrack could now become the acoustic environment for the horn – an instrument which, in turn, has had a long history as a sound signal in many parts of the world.

'The sound sources for the soundtrack are Canadian trainhorns, foghorns from both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of Canada, factory and boathorns from Vancouver and surroundings – horns that Canadians heard in daily life at the time this composition was created. Since the 1980s, however, with the gradual automation of lighthouses, many of the foghorns heard in this piece have disappeared from the coastal Canadian soundscapes. Additional sound sources are an alphorn and a creek. Most of the material was taken from the World Soundscape Project's environmental recordings collection at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC, some of it recorded by the composer.

'Listening to the various horns in the collection was fascinating because of the way their sounds were shaped and modulated by the surrounding landscape. Some horns would echo only once, others many times, their sounds slowly fading into the distance. One foghorn had an echo that was an octave lower than the actual sound, while another was an octave higher. A trainhorn's echo was half a tone lower as the train approached, but the same pitch as it passed. Each horn acquires its unique sound from the landscape it inhabits. This strong interaction between these sounds and their environment gave the inspiration to work with this material. Horn sounds are interesting for another reason – they rise above any ambience, even that of large cities. They are soundmarks that give a place its character and give us, often subliminally, a "sense of place".'

The soundtrack of the piece was composed at the Sonic Research Studio at Simon Fraser University.

Thea Musgrave (b.1928)

Golden Echo III for horn & live electronics

(World premiere)

Thea Musgrave was born in Edinburgh but has lived in the US since 1972, where she held prominent academic posts in California and New York. She is one of the most respected and most senior figures in contemporary music. Drama has long played a central role in her works, from her more than a dozen large-scale operas through to her instrumental music, in which she has asked players to embody dramatic, even theatrical roles. She has also taken inspiration from visual art, and surrounded her listeners with performers dotted across auditoria. She writes about *Golden Echo III*:

'The sonic possibilities of the horn have for a long time fascinated me and have been explored in several works: *Music for Horn & Piano* and then, later, *Night Music* and the Horn Concerto with their stereophonic effects.

'In 1986 a commission from the International Horn Society to write a pair of works for horns gave another opportunity to explore these ideas. One was to be for solo horn accompanied by 16 of its colleagues (*Golden Echo II*). In the companion piece for solo horn (*Golden Echo I*), a tape replaces the accompanying horns; some sounds imitate the horn, others do not.

'*Golden Echo I* is at times lyrical and at times dramatic. To enhance the apparent concerto-like virtuosity and freedom of the soloist which is set against the inevitable rigidity of the tape, the solo part is not written in strict rhythmic notation. The soloist thus apparently dictates the speed of the accompanying tape. This work is one of several written for solo instrument and tape. *From One to Another* for solo viola (for Peter Mark, 1970) and *Orfeo I* for solo flute (for James Galway, 1975) antedated synthesisers, and in these works the source sounds for the tape were taken from the solo instruments themselves and then manipulated electronically. In more recent electronic works the source sounds were made from a synthesiser.'

Golden Echo III is specially adapted for Ben Goldscheider. Here, the source sounds are made by him.

Mark Simpson (b.1988)

Darkness Moves II for horn & live electronics

(World premiere)

Mark Simpson has very much a dual career as a clarinettist and composer, and has worked internationally in both roles. He has written a Piano Concerto for Víkingur Ólafsson and a Violin Concerto for Nicola Benedetti, and an opera, *Pleasure* (2016), for Opera North, which was set in the toilets of a gay club. He previously wrote *Nachtstück* in 2021 for Ben Goldscheider. Simpson writes about tonight's new piece:

'*Darkness Moves II* is a continuation of my exploration of the work and ideas of the Belgian-born poet and artist Henri Michaux (1899–1984). In 1955, he experimented with the drug mescaline four times over a period of six months. He found that the most striking effects were not profound transformations of external objects but rather the inner visions which poured through his mind like a weirdly agitated and vibrating film, often seeming to possess his whole being.

'Broadly speaking, what I've tried to do is create an aural equivalent of what this experience might have felt like: a dark, frightening, ecstatic, earth-shattering dive into the unknown, and a deep confrontation with the self.

'While *Darkness Moves I* featured a recording played almost simultaneously and manipulated in a slightly controlled improvised manner with live electronics in real time, my ideas for the electronic component of *Darkness Moves II* were more specific and, as a result, the piece is very much a duet between the horn and electronics.

'Thanks go to Ben Goldscheider and the Marchus Trust for commissioning this work and also to Philip Dawson, whose expertise in realising my ideas for the electronic component have been exactly as I'd heard them.'

Programme notes © David Kettle, 2024

Find out more

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