

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 21 July 2024
7.30pm

The Light Within

Hugo Ticciati violin
Soumik Datta sarod
Gurdain Rayatt tabla
Jordan Hunt composer

O/Modernt Chamber Orchestra

Jure Smirnov Oštir violin	Annette Walther violin	Edward King cello
Caroline Pether violin	Sascha Bota viola	Brian O'Kane cello
Emma Purslow violin	Daniel Eklund viola	Jordi Carrasco-Hjelm double bass
Victoria Sayles violin	Francis Kefford viola	Alexander Jones double bass
Linda Suolahti violin	Frauke Steichert viola	
Anna Troxler violin	Julian Arp cello	

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Contrapunctus 1 from *Art of Fugue* BWV1080 (by 1742, rev. 1745-9)
Pēteris Vasks (b.1946) Concerto No. 2 'In Evening Light' (2020) *UK première*
I. Andante con passione • II. Andante cantabile • III. Andante con amore

Interval

Max Richter (b.1966) Soumik Datta (b.1983) John Lennon (1940-1980) & Paul McCartney (b.1942)	On the Nature of Daylight (2004) Migrant Birds from <i>Awaaz</i> (2022) <i>arranged by Jordan Hunt</i>
Soumik Datta Jordan Hunt (b.1982) Wojciech Kilar (1932-2013) Soumik Datta	Blackbird (1968) <i>arranged by Johannes Marmén</i> Sarod and tabla solo 1947 from <i>Awaaz</i> <i>arranged by Jordan Hunt</i> Misremembrance (2024) Orawa (1986) <i>Awaaz</i> from <i>Awaaz</i> <i>arranged by Jordan Hunt</i>

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A programme inspired by transitions and epiphanies begins with the initial *Contrapunctus* from **Bach's** *Art of Fugue*, which uncovers sensuous qualities in the most austere of subjects. This cosmic meditation on the infinite potential of tonal form prefaces the ecstatic melancholy of **Pēteris Vasks's** Violin Concerto No. 2 'Evening Light' ('Vakara gaismā'), commissioned by O/Modern in 2020, some two decades after the Latvian composer's acclaimed first violin concerto, 'Distant Light' (1999).

Like its earlier counterpart, Vasks's 'Evening Light' contemplates the power of visible and spiritual illumination, invoking the close of day as a metaphor for the twilight years of human beings. The second of the work's three movements, which are performed without interruption, portrays an individual looking back on a life fraught with intermittent dramas – a musical journey that transitions into a rapt cadenza. In contrast, the slow and cantabile outer movements are characterised by a melancholy mood of farewell, full of deep shadows and dramatic contrasts, in which optimism emerges in the twilight glow on an imagined horizon. 'Evening Light' continues Vasks's mission to nurture a spiritual reality for the contemporary world. In the composer's own words: 'Most people today no longer possess beliefs, love and ideals. The spiritual dimension has been lost. My intention is to provide food for the soul and this is what I preach in my works.'

After the interval a seamless musical flow opens with **Max Richter's** *On the Nature of Daylight* (subtitled 'Entropy'), a protest piece with personal overtones that is used to stunning effect in Denis Villeneuve's 2016 movie *Arrival*. Taken from Richter's second album, *The Blue Notebooks* (2004), it was conceived in the build-up to the second Persian Gulf War and described by Richter as 'a meditation on violence – both the violence that I had personally experienced around me as a child and the violence of war.'

The sequence continues with three movements from *Awaaz* by the British Indian composer and sarod player **Soumik Datta**, interwoven with a sarod-tabla duet (with Gurdain Rayatt on tabla) and a select group of pieces illuminating particular themes. Commissioned by BBC Radio 3 and first performed at the Proms in 2022, *Awaaz* engages with the division of India into two independent nations: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. That momentous event – the Partition – which took place at midnight on 15 August 1947, engendered a sense of confusion that Datta interprets in existential terms, asking whether the enforced displacements, accompanied by the loss of home and personal identity, might be something that 'runs deep in the DNA of South Asian people? My people?'

Awaaz, meaning 'voice' in Urdu and Hindi, though it also carries simpler connotations of 'sound' or 'noise', interrogates the Partition through the prism of the human voice, probing the emotions conveyed in disjointed shreds of words from Hindu, Urdu and Bengali. In strictly musical terms the piece considers whether a voice-based work, beginning as mere noise ('disassociated syllables devoid of

meaning', as Datta writes), might slowly journey back towards language, conversation and song. The voyage from the wreckage of exile towards a paradoxically recovered new home is undertaken by the instrumentalists and voices, who engage in a collaborative effort, attempting to reattach the given fragments. Taking a cue from Datta's stress on the shattering of the word, *Awaaz* is performed this evening in a new instrumental arrangement by Jordan Hunt.

The recorded birdsong in the work's opening movement, *Migrant Birds*, is underpinned by a drone, soon supplemented by apparently isolated tones, all coming together to create an apparition of formal unity. The Partition's climactic rupture, addressed in 1947 (the fourth movement), is approached as a multiform commotion of competing and complementary phrases, permeated with frantic uncertainty and unified by Datta's dazzling sarod improvisation. The finale (also titled *Awaaz*) attempts to reconcile the traumas of the past and restore the fractured whole, without diminishing the profound sense of loss. In aid of that quest the composer summons the spirit of Qawwali, a mystical Sufi form of music that uses hand claps and repeated chants to transport its listeners towards nirvana or spiritual enlightenment. *Awaaz* thus concludes with a paean to the healing, restorative power of music that has been an inalienable component of our human identity since time immemorial.

Paul McCartney has explained that the shaping guitar riff in 'Blackbird' came about after he and George Harrison misremembered the *Bourrée* from Bach's Lute Suite in E minor BWV996. That happy accident (a joint gift of memory and imagination) spawned one of the all-time great Beatles songs, with lyrics that acclaim the pioneering group of nine African American students who entered Little Rock Central High School in 1957. Beyoncé's cover of 'Blackbird' on her latest album, *Cowboy Carter* (2024), superbly spotlights the song's civil rights associations.

Inspired by *Awaaz's* 1947, **Jordan Hunt's** *Misremembrance* revisits the creative power of mistaken memories. While the title plays with the term 'remembrance', usually associated with solemn commemorative occasions, the work originated with a voracious earworm that woke the composer from a dream. The sticky riff, which was a misremembered fragment of Datta's 1947, was later reimagined as a virtuosic orchestral whirlwind of Schubertian variations that dramatically transform the original theme.

Finally, *Orawa* by **Wojciech Kilar** is a celebration of harvest, named after an upland pasture in the Tatra mountains, and set in late summer, when the grass has been scythed and the shepherd's work is done. Kilar, who scored more than 150 movies, considered this to be his defining work: 'Orawa is the only piece in which I wouldn't change a single note ... What is achieved in it is what I strive for – to be the best possible Kilar.'

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