



Maxwell Quartet and Alasdair Beatson (piano)

Sunday 30th October 2022, 5pm

Queen's Cross Church

Programme

George Benjamin	<i>Shadowlines</i>
Joey Roukens	<i>Visions at Sea</i>
James MacMillan	<i>We are Collective</i> *

*Commissioned by Haddo Arts and co-commissioned by **sound**, Spitalfields and Cheltenham Music Festivals.

Programme notes

George Benjamin *Shadowlines*

Six canonic preludes for piano (2001)

(i) *Cantabile* - (ii) *Wild* - (iii) *Scherzando* - (iv) *Tempestoso* - (v) *Very freely* - (vi) *Gently flowing, flexible*

This sequence of pieces, all canons in different ways, was conceived as a continuous, cumulative structure: 1) A brief, seemingly improvisatory prologue. 2) The high register, fierce and harshly chromatic, against the lower, which is consonant and calm; a compact coda reconciles these opposites. 3) A miniature scherzo, all within the space of 11/2 octaves in the bass, leading immediately to: 4) Explosive and monolithic, the pianist's hands perpetually rifting apart then re-uniting in rhythmical unison. 5) The most expansive and lyrical movement; at its heart a slow ground-bass, over which builds a widely contrasted procession of textures. After a short pause: 6) A simple and gentle epilogue. This work was written for Pierre-Laurent Aimard, and was commissioned by Betty Freeman.

Joey Roukens *Visions at Sea*

Visions at Sea is a 17-minute work that can be heard as a kind of dream sea voyage: on that journey the listener comes across all kinds of memories, all kinds of 'visions' of the Dutch maritime past – in particular the Golden Age (17thC), the time of the Dutch East India Company. In this piece, for example, fragments, quotes, have been incorporated from sailor songs that have been handed down from the Golden Age and that are known to have been sung on board the company ships. Sometimes echoes are also heard from other music that a seaman might have heard at the time,

such as Sweelinck's music. These quotes often sound alienating in the piece, like distorted memories that briefly emerge from the fog and then go back into it.

The piece starts calm and ethereal, like a typically slowly changing Dutch sky above a still sea. Little by little the piece becomes more and more brooding and the sea increasingly wilder, turning halfway through the work into a particularly violent, turbulent sea leading to a moment of storm, panic and shipwreck. Gradually the hectic pace disappears and the calm and supported music returns from the beginning. At the end the music rises to 'stratospheric heights': here I had an image in mind, as described in a 17th century maritime book, about 'the perfect ship' with which (perished) sailors make their last journey, a journey not by sea but by air: the ship ascends to heaven.

James MacMillan *We are Collective* (2022)

This one-movement piano quintet, lasting about ten minutes grew out of an initial sketch for a part-song which never came to fruition. Nevertheless some of the original 'vocal' material survives in new instrumental garb. The title was one of the lines in the original song and evokes a kind of street chant or quasi-political slogan, shouted out in rhythmic unison. In fact the original five notes for the chant of "we are collective" can be heard in the middle of this new quintet – B flat, C, B flat, D flat and E flat, and then later in various rhythmic and transposed versions.

The music is not meant to be political though, and has a light, tongue-in-cheek and somewhat sardonic flavour throughout. It begins with what seems like a fanfare on the strings, followed quickly by an energetic and boisterous passage for solo piano, marked 'martellato e secco.' All five instruments come together in declamatory style before some quieter music marked 'legato e misterioso' and then 'queasy.'

The street marching feel returns before the music heads off into what may feel like music-hall fantasy territory. The 'we are collective' theme eventually asserts itself along with wisps and allusions of half-forgotten old Scottish songs and ends with passing jazzy or bluesy references. The title is perhaps a play on the idea of the togetherness involved in ensemble playing, as well as a scepticism about collective rather than individual and personal thought.

A Great and Culturally Strategic Politician once said "Artists don't have to be close to government. They just have to have a common understanding of what the country wants." This work is dedicated to all those civic and joyful political types who have always recognised the crucial importance of instruments in cultural and artistic instrumentalism.

Biographies

Alasdair Beatson

Scottish pianist Alasdair Beatson works prolifically as soloist and chamber musician. Performances during 2022 include numerous appearances at Wigmore Hall; as concerto soloist with Royal Northern Sinfonia; in chamber music alongside such colleagues as Alina Ibragimova, Steven Isserlis, Viktoria Mullova, Pieter Wispelwey, and as member of the Nash Ensemble.

Alasdair is renowned as a sincere musician and intrepid programmer. He champions a wide repertoire with particular areas of interest: Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn,

Schubert and Schumann; the solo and chamber music of Gabriel Fauré, Bartók and Janáček; concertos of Bach, Bartók, Britten, Fauré, Hindemith, Messiaen and Mozart; and contemporary works, including the piano quintet of Thomas Adès, George Benjamin's *Shadowlines* and Harrison Birtwistle's *Harrison's Clocks*. Future plans include the first performances of a new piano concerto, written for him by Helena Winkelman.

Recent recordings include a solo piano recital *Aus Wien* on Pentatone, featuring music of Schumann, Schoenberg, Ravel, Korngold and Schubert, and Schubert works for violin and fortepiano with Viktoria Mullova on Signum. These join a discography of solo and chamber recordings on BIS, Champs Hill, Chandos, Claves, Evil Penguin, Onyx, Pentatone and SOMM labels.

Alasdair teaches solo piano at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and regularly mentors for the London-based Chamber Studio. From 2012 to 2018 Alasdair was founder and artistic director of *Musique à Marsac*, and since 2019 is artistic director of the chamber music festival in Ernen, Switzerland.

Maxwell Quartet

1st Prizewinner and Audience Prizewinner at the 9th Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition in 2017, and hailed as "brilliantly fresh, unexpected and exhilarating" by The Scottish Herald, and "superb storytelling by four great communicators" by The Strad Magazine, the Maxwell Quartet is now firmly regarded as one of Britain's finest young string quartets, with a strong connection to their folk music heritage and a commitment to bringing together wide-ranging projects and programmes to expand the string quartet repertoire.

The quartet performs regularly across the UK and abroad, at venues including London's Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, and St Martin-in-the-Fields, with performances through the Park Lane Young Artist Programme, the Tunnell Trust Awards Scheme, and the Kirckman Concert Society programme.

After their success at Trondheim in 2017, the quartet has toured widely across Europe, including performances in the Tivoli Concert Hall Series, the Amsterdam String Quartet Biennale, Stavanger Festival, Trondheim Chamber Music Festival, Schiermonnikoog and Wonderfeel Festivals in the Netherlands, Lammermuir Festival and Music at Paxton in Scotland, and more. Its debut tour of the USA in January 2019 garnered critical acclaim from the New York Times ("eloquent performers who bring the same sense of charisma and sense of adventure to their programming"), and performing to sold out venues in New York, Florida, California and Washington. Collaborations have included working with the Danish String Quartet to perform Scottish and Danish folk music, and working on a new commission for clarinet quintet with composer/clarinetist Mark Simpson. The Quartet's debut CD on Linn Records, featuring string quartets by Haydn alongside the quartet's own compositions based on Scottish traditional folk music, received glowing reviews from international press.

The Quartet is formed of four close friends, who grew up playing folk and classical music together in youth orchestras and music schools across Scotland. The group officially began in 2010 at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where its founding members met as postgraduate students. In 2011, the Maxwell Quartet was named as Residency Artists for Enterprise Music Scotland 2011-2013, which saw several acclaimed concert tours over their two-year tenure. Performing widely across

Scotland, the quartet established a reputation for delighting audiences with their "unaffected enthusiasm" (North Highland Times) and their "panache and conviction" (Strathearn Herald). The quartet has since held residencies at Oxford University, Perth Concert Hall and many chamber music festivals across the UK, including their own festival *Loch Shiel* in the west highlands of Scotland, and a new self-curated concert series at *Guardswell Farm* in Perthshire. The quartet currently holds the position of Associate Artist at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, and at Music at Paxton Festival in the Scottish Borders.

Passionate about collaborating with musicians and other artforms, the quartet has worked with a global roster of artists and institutions including Cryptic Theatre, Wintour's Leap, Royal Ballet School, Lunir, cinematographer Herman Kolgen and many more. The quartet has also worked with some of the UK's most dynamic composers including commissions by Anna Meredith, Tom Harrold, Mark Simpson and Colin Broom. In addition to a busy concert diary, the quartet regularly feature in broadcasts for BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio Scotland, as well as regularly giving schools workshops and concerts for children.

The Maxwell Quartet has studied with the Endellion Quartet through a Chamber Studio mentorship programme at King's Place, and privately with Hatto Beyerle, founding member of the Alban Berg Quartet, in Hanover, Germany. Other mentors have included Miguel da Silva (Quatuor Ysaye), Erich Hobarth (Quatuor Mosaiques), Krzysztof Chorzelski (Belcea Quartet), Donald Grant (Elias) and Alasdair Tait.

The quartet plays on two fine Italian violins, by Castello and Calcanius, generously loaned to them from the Harrison Frank Foundation; a J.B Vuillaume viola, and a Francesco Ruggieri cello, both on loan from generous benefactors.

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