

**Siwan Rhys (piano), Rolf Hind (piano),  
Richard Craig (flute), Kirsty Lawie (spoken word)**

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023, 1.10pm

St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen

**Programme**

James Weeks	<i>Gloomy Clouds</i> performed by Rolf Hind
Nan Shepherd	Text from <i>The Living Mountain</i> read by Kirsty Lawie with improvisation by Richard Craig and Siwan Rhys
James Weeks	<i>Siciliano</i> performed by Rolf Hind
Nan Shepherd	Text from <i>The Living Mountain</i> read by Kirsty Lawie with improvisation by Richard Craig and Siwan Rhys
James Weeks	<i>Narrow Path</i> performed by Richard Craig
Nan Shepherd	Text from <i>The Living Mountain</i> read by Kirsty Lawie with improvisation by Rolf Hind
James Weeks	<i>Durham</i> performed by Siwan Rhys

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**Programme notes**

Although the original starting-points for these four pieces were quite specific and diverse, in today's unexpected juxtaposition with Nan Shepherd they can be heard more abstractly as ruminations on different kinds of space, atmosphere and landscape.

Rolf plays two pieces I wrote at the very start of my career, when I was studying with the great composer and pianist Michael Finnissy. I can hear myself working through his influence in these pieces, though also with a more personal sense for spaciousness and sparseness. *Gloomy Clouds* (2002) dissolves the notes of Liszt's *Nuages Gris* into contrapuntal nebulae. *Siciliano* is a Romantic miniature emptied out into nearly nothing: the left hand haltingly traces the characteristic undulating rhythm of the siciliano, while the right hand hangs melodic cobwebs above it.

Richard plays *Narrow Path*, a piece I wrote for Japanese collective em.em.em's Hibari project, dedicated to the relief of the victims of the ecological and nuclear disasters in Northern Japan in 2011. It was recorded for Hibari by Reiko Manabe. The following text from Bashō inspired the piece's atmosphere:

'There was a huge body of mountains obstructing my way to the province of Dewa, and the road was terribly uncertain. The mountains were so thickly covered with foliage and the air underneath was so hushed that I felt as if I were groping my way in the dead of night. There was not even the cry of a single bird to be heard, and the wind seemed to breathe out black soot through every rift in the hanging clouds.'  
Bashō, Oku no hosomichi

Siwan plays *Durham*, a short piece written to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Howard Skempton (another early mentor) in 2017. In a way it's another Romantic miniature: I had recently started a new job in Durham, and one day I was walking towards the Cathedral in thick fog as the Angelus was ringing for morning prayer. This musical response came some time later, as a memory of a very intense, unsettled and quite grief-like feeling.

## Biographies

**James Weeks** (\*1978) is a composer, conductor and artistic director, based in the North of England. His music has been performed and broadcast worldwide, and seven portrait discs have been released to date: *Book of Flames and Shadows* (Winter&Winter, 2022) *Summer* (another timbre 2021), *windfell* (another timbre 2019), *Mala punica* (Winter&Winter, 2017), *Signs of Occupation* (Métier 2016), *mural* (confront 2015) and *TIDE* (Métier 2013). His work also appears on the Wandelweiser, HCR and NMC labels.

Collaborators and other performers of his work have included Quatuor Bozzini, Explore Ensemble, London Sinfonietta, Royal Northern Sinfonia, BBC SSO, Ives Ensemble, Plus-Minus, An Assembly, Talea, EXAUDI, Ekmeles, CoMA, Mira Benjamin, Saviet/Houston, Apartment House and Anton Lukoszevieze.

In 2002 he co-founded EXAUDI, now regarded as one of the world's leading vocal ensembles for new music. As well as maintaining a busy international touring and recording schedule with EXAUDI, he works regularly as a guest conductor, working regularly with instrumental ensembles and orchestras such as Royal Northern Sinfonia, BBC Singers and many others. He lectures in Composition at Durham University.

Welsh pianist **Siwan Rhys** enjoys a varied career of solo, chamber, and ensemble playing, with a strong focus on contemporary music and collaboration with composers. She has played at prestigious British venues such as Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Barbican Hall, Symphony Hall, St David's Hall, and abroad at Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Carnegie Hall, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Tokyo Opera City and others. She has also appeared at the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh Festival, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Cheltenham Festival, and has recorded many times for television, radio, and commercial release.

Recent releases include a critically-acclaimed recording of Stockhausen's *KONTAKTE* and of Oliver Leith's *good day good day bad day bad day*, a re-voicing by Mira Calix of a selection of John Cage's Sonatas and Interludes, a Barbara Monk Feldman portrait disc, and Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* with Colin Currie Group.

Siwan is a member of piano-percussion duo GBSR Duo with which she is an hcmf//fielding talent artist. She is also a member of new music group Explore Ensemble, and works regularly with mezzo-soprano Lucy Goddard. Also a regular ensemble and orchestral pianist, Siwan has worked with London Sinfonietta, Colin Currie Group, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, and London Symphony Orchestra.

**Richard Craig** has a multifaceted career as teacher, performer, composer/improviser and independent researcher. He studied flute at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with Richard Blake, and later with Mario Caroli at the Conservatoire de Strasbourg, France. Specialising in contemporary music, Richard has performed with Klangforum Wien, Musikfabrik and ensembles in the UK such as Ensemble Octandre and the Riot Ensemble. As a recording artist he has released two solo discs (INWARD and VALE) on the Mètier label, as well as numerous chamber music recordings and radio broadcasts. Alongside his work as a performer, Richard gives masterclasses and seminars. He was a Visiting Fellow in Performance at the University of Aberdeen 2010 – 2012. In 2015 he was appointed as a lecturer and Head of Performance at Bangor University, Wales, a post he held until 2019. During this time he was also an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Huddersfield. Richard is currently Director of Performance at the University of Edinburgh.

**Rolf Hind**'s career has established him as a major force as soloist, composer, recording artist, chamber musician, pedagogue, collaborator and concert planner. He has given recitals at many of Europe's leading new music festivals, and at Carnegie Hall, Sydney Opera House and on tours of Korea, Taiwan and Cuba. Rolf has worked with many leading conductors, including Ashkenazy, Knussen, Rattle, David Robertson and Andrew Davis and appeared seven times at the BBC Proms. Orchestras he has worked with include the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Munich Philharmonic, Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Malmö Symphony, and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, many appearances with the London Sinfonietta, the LPO, RPO, and with all the BBC orchestras.

Composers who have worked with Rolf or written for him include Tan Dun, John Adams, Helmut Lachenmann, Unsuk Chin, Elliott Carter, George Benjamin and James MacMillan. Rolf's compositions include a piano concerto, *Maya-Sesha* (nominated for a British Composer's Award) and a concerto for accordion, premiered at London's Barbican Centre. Much of his music is inspired by India, where he travels often, while drawing on the technical adventurousness of performers including himself.

An interest in new dance resulted in collaborations including with choreographer Rui Horta on a large-scale tour of a new work, *Danza Preparata*, featuring John Cage's Sonatas and Interludes for prepared piano, with dancer.

As pianist Rolf curated and performed in *Occupy The Pianos*, a piano festival which became a regular feature at St John's Smith Square in London and also travelled to France and Denmark. He initiated a project in March 2020 which produced over 100 new short piano pieces from composers far and wide, intended as responses to lockdown, a fascinating range of pieces which he is now including in recital and which has been performed in London, Glasgow and Zagreb. He re-visited a masterpiece in the form of Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant Jesus*.

His first opera, *Lost in Thought*, a 'Mindfulness opera' commissioned by Mahogany Opera Group was premiered at The Barbican in London. Current composition plans include an operatic project about the poet Sufi Rumi, working with Rolf's long-time collaborator Frederick Wake-Walker and the Anglo-US poet Dante Micheaux. He is also writing a song-cycle for Elaine Mitchener and Apartment House for the Wigmore Hall in 2024.

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