

ISOLA

Héloïse Bernard (soprano) & Electra Perivolaris (piano)

Thursday 30th October 2025, 12.45pm

Cowdray Hall, Aberdeen

Programme

Henry Purcell	<i>Fairest Isle</i>
Samuel Barber	<i>A Desire for Hermitage</i>
Electra Perivolaris	<i>ISOLA Song Cycle*</i> (world première)
Lili Boulanger	<i>Le Retour</i>

*commissioned by **sound**

Programme notes

This programme, specially designed for the lunchtime concert recital series at Cowdray Hall, will see long-term collaborators Electra Perivolaris (composer, pianist) and Héloïse Bernard (soprano) coming together again to premiere a new song cycle, composed by Electra, and framed by music from other composers which explore the themes of islands, complex identities, and isolation.

Electra's new song cycle has been shaped by a series of images taken by photographer and writer John Perivolaris at the opposite ends of Europe, in the Western Isles of Scotland and the islands of the Eastern Aegean, acknowledging the fact that the lives of Electra and John are defined, respectively, by their family origins in the Greek island of Chios and the Scottish island of Arran.

The image series was begun in April -May 2020, in a period of enforced isolation on Arran during the first coronavirus lockdown in the UK. This led John to find parallels between islands at the edges of Europe to the point where, in this work, they merge to become the Island that defines his experience and imagination.

John composed a series of five poems to accompany the photographs that comprise ISOLA, a series that reflects on the island as an existential condition, in the context of European migration. The texts provide the lyrics for this new song cycle which is influenced by the way that diaspora can enable the creation of musical forms which challenge notions of binary musical and personal identities.

1. ALL THE HARBOUR COULD NOT HOLD

With a suitcase in my hand
containing all the harbour could not hold
half the ships now out at sea
my heart is on an island wherever I go
always scanning the horizon
the shimmering distance
my feet torn from the ground
my memories a scattering of pollen
a field of tulips
withering in a vase.

2. LETHE

Chalk in the mouth
Gold in the distance
Every departure
A homecoming

The outline of an island
Floating in the air
Dolphins in the bay
Of bleached memories

Between islands and cities
Rising East and setting West
Every departure
A homecoming

The swans are suspended
Symmetry frosted
Above and below
Thin river ice

The boats are beached
Only chalk in the mouth
The horizon is empty
Cold in the distance.

3. FOLLOWING EURYDICE

Her homeland?
Where is mine now?

With her, I held my breath
and descended
to the untranslatable
depths

A shared emptiness
without subjects or objects

I resurfaced
An imitation of myself

Looking blindly for the invisible
winded in the full glare

Never knowing what to write
in the empty sections
of forms
demanding a `profession`
or a `nationality`

A frontier citizen
framed and summoned
by the in-between
of disputed islands

Conquered by many
and owned by none.

4. DEPARTURE

Departure
Two figures
A window
The night

Bergman's ticking clock
Against the pane a flickering moth
A tattered coat on the branch outside
Pixelated rain

The lighthouse pulse
The island
Holding its place
In the liquid darkness.

5. ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP

Between sunrise and sunset
the daily weighing of souls.

I'm for yes, he said;
The silence of my island
where a single June flower
transports me.

No firm ground
for those in-between.
The journey begins at one shore
and ends at another.

Lament the body
of the seagull's flight
across the meadow -
Earthbound remains
waylaid.

Grainy night
A typewriter full of sand
Stranded on the shore
Digging in the ashes
Dust in my pockets.

Wings sprout from the eyes
of sleep

M
emory

Arriving too early
Or too late
Places are the locations that pain us
There but not there
The haunting absence of ghosts.

Alone in a field

I
cannot see

for the trees

Fallen leaves on the ground

Photographs left behind

Like scars

The moment

when one decides

which way to fly

entre chien et loup.

After this world premiere performance, there will be several ‘pop-up’ performances on 31st October and 1st November at Seabury House (next to St Andrew's Cathedral), alongside the exhibition of the photographs taken by John Perivolaris which inspired the song cycle. The exhibition is open on the 23rd, 24th, 25th and 30th October and the 1st November from 10am-5pm. There will be an open workshop and ‘walk around the exhibition’ with the photographer and composer on the 25th October. For full details please see www.sound-scotland.co.uk.

Biographies

Electra Perivolaris (b.1996) is a composer and pianist from Scotland of mixed British and Greek heritage, described as ‘A Classical Star of the Future’ by BBC Introducing and ‘One of a new generation of female trailblazers’ by BBC Radio 3. Recent commissions have included works for the London Sinfonietta, BBC Singers, BBC Concert Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra Composers’ Hub, Hebrides Ensemble, and Streetwise Opera. Electra is finishing a Doctorate in Composition at the University of Oxford, after completing undergraduate studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Masters studies at London’s Royal Academy of Music, winning the DipRAM Award for an Outstanding Final Composition Portfolio. Electra was a 2022-2023 Royal Philharmonic Society Composer and was awarded the Young Classical Artists Trust 2024-2025 Composer Fellowship in its inaugural year, composing new Wigmore Hall commissions for YCAT performers. Her music draws inspiration from her mixed Scottish and Greek island heritages, focusing on the interconnections between human life and the natural world.

French soprano **Héloïse Bernard** grew up in Paris where she studied humanities and acting. She lived and studied in the Netherlands, Estonia and Scotland, where she settled. Héloïse sings as a soloist with early music ensembles Spinacino Consort, the Linarol Consort of Viols, and her own ensemble, Belesama, with harpsichordist Jan Waterfield. On stage she has sung Susanna in Mozart’s *Nozze di Figaro* with the Orchestra of Castello, Missia in Lehar’s *Merry Widow* at the Festival d’Opéra Bouffe d’Etriché, and Dido in Dido and Aeneas with the Young Northern Baroque ensemble in Tallinn. Her soprano voice “full of charm and emotion” (*RES Musica*) is featured in the Eccles’ recording of *Semele* by the Academy of Ancient Music in the role of Iris, and will also appear on the soon to be released recording of “The Green Lover” based on the song book of Margaret of Austria, with the Linarol Consort of Viols.

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