



Composer portraits: Laura Bowler (UK) and Jérôme Combier (Fr)

Conducted by Jean Deroyer

Saturday 1st November 2025, 6pm

The Lemon Tree, Aberdeen

Programme

Jérôme Combier	Woods and bones (UK Premiere)
Laura Bowler	Ping (UK Premiere) *
Jérôme Combier	Dawnlight (UK Premiere)

* Commissioned by the Legato Project with the support of the French Ministry of Culture's commissioning fund for original new musical works.

Cédric Jullion (flute), Bogdan Sydorenko (clarinet), Alexandra Greffin-Klein (violin), Ingrid Schoenlaub (cello) and Maroussia Gentet (piano).

Legato is a unique international cooperation programme for early-career composers, co-designed by partner organisations from three countries: France (the Ensemble(s) Festival, co-organized by Ensembles 2e2m, Cairn, Court-circuit, Multilatérale, and Sillages); Ireland (Contemporary Music Centre Ireland and New Music Dublin) and the UK (**soundfestival**).

Laura Bowler and Jérôme Combier were mentors on the project, and as part of the project, Laura was commissioned to write a new work.

Programme notes

Jérôme Combier *Woods and bones* for cello (13')

"In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery."

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Wood and bones is constructed in two rhythmic and gestual movements separated by a short moment of suspended sounds. The first movement explore pizzicati (played on the left hand at the same time as the bow col legno battuto) and glissandi obtained with a bottleneck.

Then it develops a small dance of bones, made with col legno battuto behind the bridge and harmonic pizzicati on the left hand: something not common for a cellist because it implies independence of hands. The second rhythmic movement is a very gestual and physical music, made of col legno battuto sounds, hit on the "tasto" part, bow rebounds, "taping" of left hand. Between these two movements, a short moment explores the open strings and the harmonics of the cello in a large single sentence. There is, in *Wood and bones*, a special scordatura which makes some strange harmonics possible: C / F? / C? / A. *Wood and bones* would be like the music of an unknown ritual. It summons wooden materials - the wood we hit to summon spirits -, and rattling of bones - bones we agitate to keep the fate at bay. Is *Wood and Bones* the end of one world ?

It seems to be saying that no bow game is possible, no lyricism. In this music, there is no "human voice", it has disappeared. There is no lyrical phrase, no melody that a bow would make vibrate, almost no note played such as memory keeps track of a bygone era. Is this to say that there is no more music possible?

On the contrary, it seems that on this ground of negativity grows an ignored expressiveness made up of obstinate pulsations, fast rhythms and improbable timbres: bouncing bows, pizzicati of harmonics, striking the hand with the key, "taping" and "bottleneck" (specific to popular guitar) - so many unsuspected gestures that go back to primitive sources: rhythm and its cathartic powers, virtuosity. A different world appears, stemming from a very personal action, encountering remains, ruins, a world looked in front, a primitive world which contains the possibility of another sensitivity. *"Death is just a passage, say the shamans. After death, existence continues as before. The world just looks more twilight."*

Jérôme Combier

Laura Bowler *Ping* (2025)

Ping is a dialogue between the instrumental language of the ensemble and Beckett's text, *Ping*. The text was pre-recorded by Irish actor, Marty Rea, following rhythmic and tempi direction from Laura Bowler. The pre-recorded text served as the starting point for the instrumental material, connecting and disconnecting the instrumental lines and texture. The instrumental language is drawn directly from the contours, tone and rhythmic performance of the text, creating a wordless echoing mirror of Beckett's text. The composition intentionally avoids musical accompaniment of the text, but instead aims to create a conversation between the spoken and internal voice of the text.

Laura Bowler

Jérôme Combier *Dawnlight for flute, piano, violin, cello and live electronics* (2015) (20')

Dawnlight was initially meant to be a ritual music, a transition towards dawn, a crossing of night in the depths of which a dance, primitive and shamanistic, could have appeared, unveiling itself after twists of sound.

Dawnlight was written for the dancer-choreographer Alban Richard. Together we chose a double starting point that brought together our respective preoccupations: phrasings, respiration, breath — for me, the presence of the human in the timbre itself — and a reference, at the centre of the piece, to *katadjak*, throat singing as practiced by Inuit women as a kind of game.

It is not about making *Dawnlight* an homage to Inuit culture but rather, by only taking this sound reference as a base (*katadjak* is perhaps not even music), and creating, starting from these tribal chants, an improbable world, a bit shamanistic, a bit animist, simplistic. For me, a remote homage to Antoine Volodine's book *Dondog*.

It is the electronic part that embodies these multiple voices, spatialised, fragmented, and focalised in a rhythmic pattern that summons ritual and the evocation of a trance, broken up as soon as it appears.

Jérôme Combier

Biographies

The musicians playing in today's concert are each from one of the ensembles that created *Festival Ensembles*, a festival of new music that takes place in Bagnolet (France) in September each year:

2e2m (Artistic Director Léo Margue): <http://ensemble2e2m.fr/>

Cairn (Artistic Director Jérôme Combier): ensemble-cairn.com

Court-circuit (Artistic Director Philippe Hurel): court-circuit.fr

Multilatérale (Artistic Director Yann Robin): multilaterale.fr

Sillages (Artistic Director Gonzalo Bustos) : ensemblesillages.com

The French conductor **Jean Deroyer** has conducted the following orchestras: NHK Symphony Orchestra, Radio Symphonie Orchester Wien, SWR Orchester Baden-Baden, RSO Orchester Stuttgart, Deutsche Symphonie Orchester, Sinfonia Varsovia, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre national de France, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio-France, Orchestre National de Lille, Orchestre National de Lyon, Ensemble Intercontemporain and Klangforum Wien in halls like Wien Konzerthaus, Berlin Philharmonie, salle Pleyel, Luzern Hall, Tokyo Opera City and Lincoln Center in New-York.

Over several years Deroyer has built a close and privileged relationship with Ensemble Intercontemporain that he conducted several times. Alongside Pierre Boulez and Peter Eötvös he conducted Stockhausen's Gruppen for three orchestras at the 2007 Lucerne Festival. In September 2007, he made his debut with the Orchestre de Paris and he will work again with this orchestra during forthcoming seasons. Besides he has recorded numerous CDs with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo or Orchestre National d'île-de-France for such labels as EMI Music and Naïve or for Radio-France.

In 2010, he gave the premiere of *Les Boulingrin*, opera composed by Georges Aperghis, staged by Jérôme Deschamps at the Opera Comique in Paris, with the Klangforum Wien. Then he conducted Pelléas et Mélisande at the Opera de Rouen and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio-France in Paul Dukas' Ariane et Barbe Bleue. In 2012 he gave the premiere of JJR by Phillipe Fénelon at Grand Théâtre de Genève, staged by Robert Carsen. Recently he conducted *Cassandra* composed by Michael Jarrell at the Avignon Festival with Fanny Ardant, as well as Reigen of Philippe Boesmans at the Opéra national de Paris.

Notable forthcoming engagements include concerts with BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, Opera National de Paris, Ensemble Modern, Auckland Philharmonia and RTE National Symphony Orchestra Dublin.

Jérôme Combier began studying composition, harmony and counterpoint, analysis and orchestration under Hacène Larbi. He won first prize for counterpoint at the Conservatoire of Rueil-Malmaison. In 1997, he was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire in the class of Emmanuel Nunes. In 1998, he received a premier prix in analysis in Michaël Levinas's class. In addition, he completed a Master's degree with a dissertation on Anton Webern at Paris VIII University.

In 1995, he was a finalist in the Griegselskalpet competition in Oslo. In September 1998, he was resident at the Royaumont Foundation and in the framework of an exchange with Royaumont, he was a composer in residence in Japan, in Akiyoshidaï for two months. In 2001, he earned a premier prix in composition, being unanimously placed first by the panel, and was selected to enter the programme in composition and computer- assisted music organised by IRCAM. Jérôme Combier is a prize-winner of the Bleustein-Blanchet Foundation and the Pierre Cardin Foundation.

In 2002, he was commissioned by Radio-France to write a piece for the Orchestre National de France, Pays de vent. In 2003 and 2004, with the support of the Paris Conservatoire, he organised concerts and courses in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. From 2004 to 2006 he was a scholarship holder at the Villa Médicis (the French Academy in Rome). During this time he met Raphaël Thierry who was to realise the visual installations for the cycle *Vies silencieuses* written for the Ensemble Cairn. The CD of *Vies silencieuses* won the Grand Prix Charles Cros.

At Rome, in the Sabine Villages, he took part along with the visual artist Xavier Noiret-Thomé in the exhibition '20 eventi' under the patronage of Giuseppe Penone. In 2005 he composed music for the Ensemble Recherche in the framework of the Festival d'Automne in Paris. In collaboration with Pierre Nouvel, he created the installation Noir Gris for the Beckett exposition organised by the Centre Georges Pompidou. Since 2006, he has been invited regularly by the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence to contribute as a guest to the Académie européenne de musique's activities and in 2011, in association with the video artist Pierre Nouvel, he imagined the Opéra Austerlitz based on the novel by W.G Sebald. Austerlitz was produced by the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, the Opéra de Lille and the Kaaitheater of Brussels. In 2008 he was a composer teacher at Royaumont Abbey.

In 2009 he obtained a commission by the Musée du Louvre during the cycle of concerts " Le Louvre invite Pierre Boulez". His piece, Anima Foglia for violin, was also played at Lucern Festival. In 2012, the Opéra de Lyon commissioned an opéra based on the novel Terre et cendres by the afghan writer Atiq Rahimi.

Jérôme Combier's writing is atomized, distributed in fine fragments of matter, it tends towards purity as if this were a way to give back to music the immateriality that is its own. Equivocal and refined, Jérôme Combier's sound world is inhabited by a thought of poetic and plastic essence that shapes the instrumental gesture. Constructed music, labyrinthic, both fluid and discontinuous, it invites us to decrypt a mystery, to an experience of strangeness.

His music is published by H.Lemoine. Some of his works have already been recorded by the Ensemble Cairn on the Motus label and Æon. Jérôme Combier is the artistic director of Ensemble Cairn, he is teacher at the school of arts : Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts de Paris-Cergy. In 2017 Jérôme Combier obtained a grant award from Koussevitzky Foundation (Library of Congress, Washington).

Laura Bowler (born 1986) described as “a triple threat composer-performer provocatrice” (The Art Desk), is a composer and vocalist specialising in multidisciplinary works and music theatre. Bowler has been commissioned by leading ensembles, orchestras and festivals across the globe, including the London Symphony Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Royal Opera House, Opera Holland Park, The Opera Group, Manchester Camerata, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Ensemble Phace (Austria), Ensemble Linea (France), Omega Ensemble (Australia), Donaueschinger Musiktage, MaerzMusik, and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, among others.

Her recent oeuvre includes *The Blue Woman*, a chamber opera commissioned by the Royal Opera House for its Engender Festival at the Linbury Theatre; *Wicked Problems*, a chamber work for voice and bass flute created in collaboration with flautist Ruth Morley, which received the Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Chamber-Scale Composition; *ADVERT*, a music-theatre piece commissioned by Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, New Music Dublin, Musica Estranha, Ultima, Time in Music, Music on Main and November Music; and *Girl with the Hurricane Brain*, commissioned by Ensemble Lydenskab which premiered at Aalborg and Copenhagen Opera Festival in Summer 2024

Other notable works include *FFF*, a multimedia music theatre work for ensemble and voice commissioned by Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and BBC Radio 3; *Damned Mob of Scribbling Women*, a music-theatre song cycle for mezzo-soprano Lucy Goddard, nominated for a British Composer Award; *Houses Slide*, an off-grid performance powered by bicycles for London Sinfonietta and vocalist Jessica Aszodi; *distance*, a work jointly commissioned by sound, Spitalfields, and Cheltenham Music Festivals; and *Antarctica*, a 50-

minute multimedia composition for orchestra and voice, co-commissioned by Manchester Camerata and BBC Radio 3.

Laura completed her BMus (Hons) at the Royal Northern College of Music and Sibelius Academy (Finland), followed by her MMus and PhD at the Royal Academy of Music. She also completed an MA in Theatre Directing at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. She is currently Lecturer in Composition at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Trinity Laban Conservatoire and the Royal Northern College of Music. She is currently lecturer in composition at Royal Northern College of Music and Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

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