

Classical Music
Concert programme

barbican

**Explore Ensemble &
EXAUDI: Eight Lines**

Sat 1 Nov 7.30pm

Milton Court Concert Hall

Important information



When does the concert start and finish?

The concert begins at 7.30pm and finishes at about 9.15pm, with a 20-minute interval.



I'm running late!

Latecomers will be admitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



Please ...

Switch any watch alarms and mobile phones to silent during the performance.



Please don't ...

Take photos or recordings during the performance – save it for the curtain call.



Use a hearing aid?

Please use our induction loop – just switch your hearing aid to T setting on entering the hall.



Need a break?

You can leave at any time and be readmitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



Looking for refreshments?

Bars are located on Levels -1, G and 1.



Looking for the toilets?

The nearest toilets, including accessible toilets, are located on Levels G, 1 and 2.



Carrying bags and coats?

Drop them off at our free cloak room on Level -1.

Explore Ensemble & EXAUDI: Eight Lines

Sat 1 Nov 7.30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

Explore Ensemble
EXAUDI Vocal Ensemble
James Weeks conductor

James Tenney *In a large, open space*
Steve Reich *Eight Lines*

Interval 20 minutes

Catherine Lamb *dying your dying to
come closer**
(world premiere of Barbican co-commission)

*Commissioned by Explore Ensemble with support from the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, The Radcliffe Trust and Arts Council England's National Lottery Project Grants. Co-commissioned by The Barbican and Rainy Days.

Produced by the Barbican

Programme produced by Harriet Smith
All information correct at time of printing



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Tonight we celebrate the rich seam of American minimalism through the music of Steve Reich and James Tenney together with the world premiere of *dying your dying to come closer* by Catherine Lamb, who studied with Tenney. To perform it we're delighted to welcome the stellar Explore Ensemble and EXAUDI, conducted by James Weeks.

Intricate connecting threads – both musical and personal – tie together all three pieces in tonight's programme. At the centre of them lies this evening's first composer, New Mexico-born James Tenney (1934–2006). He was a hugely influential figure, one who was revered by fellow musicians – his death was keenly felt in North American new music circles, and far beyond – but he's also a composer who remains far lesser known among the general listening public.

Tenney, nonetheless, stood at a pivotal point in US music. He was a student of such iconic (not to say iconoclastic) teachers as John Cage, Henry Brant, Carl Ruggles, Harry Partch and Edgard Varèse, and their deeply individual perspectives on musical creativity undoubtedly informed Tenney's own lyrical experimentalism. He was a contemporary of minimalists Philip Glass and Steve Reich – whose *Eight Lines* we'll hear later – and played in both men's own performing ensembles. And among Tenney's own students, in his many teaching roles across the USA and Canada, are such accomplished younger figures as John Luther Adams, Larry Polansky, Peter Garland and Catherine Lamb, tonight's final composer.

If there's one composer who exerted the profoundest influence on Tenney's work, however, it was Cage – most distinctively in the freedom with which the younger

musician approached the fundamental building blocks and philosophies of music. Tenney was one of the earliest composers to explore 'plunderphonics' (which takes recognisable musical works and manipulates them sonically), for example, in his 1961 *Collage No 1*, based entirely on Elvis Presley's *Blue Suede Shoes*. He was also a pioneer in computer music, using early algorithms and synthesizers in several works. But Tenney maintained an abiding fascination, too, with tuning systems, microtonality and how the human ear (and brain) perceives harmony. In drilling down into the fundamentals of sound itself, and exploring in microscopic detail all the myriad notes that fall into the gaps between the keys of a conventionally tuned piano, Tenney created deeply beautiful, immersive music that invites and rewards deep listening.

Tonight's opening work is one such piece. In many ways, Tenney's *In a large, open space* from 1994 couldn't be simpler. An ensemble of 12 or more musicians choose their own individual pitches from a set of 32 offered by Tenney, holding those notes quietly for a minute or so, then moving on to another. The notes on offer, however, all form part of the natural harmonic series based on a low fundamental F – in other words, they're all contained or at least suggested by that low note, even if they're seldom clearly audible. Tenney simply makes those naturally occurring overtones into the material for his piece, in a harmonic landscape that's in constant movement, yet always remains essentially the same. As the piece's title implies, Tenney intended to fill a space with this kaleidoscopic sound, with performers scattered right across it: in a typically Cageian touch, there's no one 'correct' way to experience the piece, so direct your attention (or even your feet) to the sounds emanating from all around you.

From an open-ended, space-filling immersive experience, there's far more focus and definition in tonight's second piece. Steve Reich (born 1936) was already gaining fame and notoriety when he wrote his *Eight Lines* in 1979. He'd moved on from his earlier works exploring phasing – requiring live musicians to shift slowly apart from each other through minute

adjustments to their speeds – and was delving into complexity derived from simple ingredients. In the case of *Eight Lines*, almost all of what you'll hear is based on the propulsively rhythmic, rising-and-falling figures heard in the two pianos right at the start. Flutes and clarinets slowly construct melodic ideas that reveal themselves to be simply staggered versions of those piano figures, while strings intone gradually lengthening harmonies, themselves based on the pianos' material. Rather than the abrupt harmonic cross-cuts that Reich had favoured in earlier pieces (and would return to in later ones too), *Eight Lines* presents smooth, sometimes almost imperceptible transitions between its five large-scale sections, as instruments fade out and others quietly join in, and before you know it you're in an entirely new harmonic world.

Eight Lines's 1979 premiere was under its original title of *Octet*, and it was indeed originally conceived for eight instruments: two pianos, string quartet, plus flute and clarinet (doubling piccolo and bass clarinet). In 1983 Reich rescored the piece for a slightly larger ensemble – essentially to make performance less technically awkward – and therefore adjusted its title: although there might be significantly more than eight performers, there remain just eight lines of music.

Tonight's final composer Catherine Lamb was born in Washington in 1982 and is now based in Berlin. She studied with James Tenney between 2003 and 2006 at the California Institute of the Arts (better known as CalArts) and cites her erstwhile teacher as exerting a formative influence on her later musical thinking. She maintains a fascination with the minutiae of acoustics, intonation and how listeners perceive them, but has often taken a more intimate approach to those ideas, creating music that unfolds slowly over long durations, and exploring slow processes that are intended to be inhabited rather than leading the listener to a particular goal.

Lamb's new work, however, takes the composer in a perhaps unfamiliar direction. She writes about *dying your dying to come closer*:

'This piece searches for the in-between spaces where opposing elements corrade together, such as form/formlessness, cycle/change, sound/language, story/poetry, return/evolve, destruction/empathy, pattern/dissolution. It takes direct inspiration from the work of author Ursula K Le Guin, particularly drawing from her 1985 masterpiece *Always Coming Home*. In our increasingly hostile world corrupted by fascism and greed, Le Guin's imbued Taoist philosophies centre on the visualisation of tangible pathways towards more peaceful realities, allowing for a shimmering refuge to her readers.

'I ruminate on a poem of hers entitled *From the People of the Houses of Earth in the Valley to the Other People Who Were on Earth Before Them*, written in the 1980s, from the perspective of a peacefully evolved, futuristic utopian community in northern California, while at the same time passing on ancient knowledge from some original dwellers (such as the Yurok and the Papago). The poem is a message from one potential future reality addressing our own current reality as well as past realities (whether Le Guin's perspective in the 1980s or Laozi's perspective in the sixth century BCE). It is at the heart of this piece, which is titled after a line in the poem.

'My work has typically rejected the use of vocalised language – as I find that the state of listening involving language acquisition occupies a very different phenomenological state than listening to sound without direct linguistic meaning. However, songs are one of the earliest human art forms that have continued to thrive and will certainly continue further. They have the incredible ability, perhaps more than any other artform, to reflect on the human experience, such as love and resistance. In Le Guin's imagined realities, songs are extremely important, elemental and assumed. Like story. It's Le Guin's particular classical storytelling, her experimentalism, her blurring of time/space, and her deep love of humanity – in spite of it all – that continues to draw me back to her writing. For her, I allow actual words into the music, her words.'

© David Kettle

Catherine Lamb

dying your dying to come closer

In the beginning when the word was
spoken,
in the beginning when the fire was lighted,
in the beginning when the house was built,
we were among you.
Silent, like a word not spoken,
dark, like a fire not lighted,
formless, like a house not built,
we were among you:
the sold woman,
the enslaved enemy.
We were among you, coming
closer,
coming closer to the world.
In your time when all the words were
written,
in your time when everything was fuel,
in your time when houses hid the ground,
we were among you.
Quiet, like a word whispered,
dim, like a coal under ashes,
insubstantial, like the idea of a house,
we were among you:
the hungry,
the powerless,
in your world, coming closer,
coming closer to our world.
In your ending when the words were
forgotten,
in your ending when the fires burned out,
in your ending when the walls fell down,
we were among you:
the children,
your children,
dying your dying to come closer,
to come into our world, to be born.
We were the sands on your sea-coasts,
the stones of your hearths. You did not
know us.
We were the words you had no language
for.
O our fathers and mothers!
We were always your children.
From the beginning, from the beginning,
we are your children.

*From the People of the Houses of Earth in
the Valley to the Other People Who Were
on Earth Before Them from Always Coming
Home* by Ursula K Le Guin (1929–2018); used
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James Weeks

James Weeks was born in 1978 and is a composer, conductor and artistic director based in the North of England.

His music has been performed and broadcast worldwide, and seven albums 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, NMC and New Focus labels.

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

His awards include a British Composer Award in 2018 for *Libro di fiammelle e ombre* and an Ivors Academy Composer Award in 2019 for *Leafleoht*.

In 2002 he founded EXAUDI with soprano Juliet Fraser, now regarded as one of the world's leading new-music vocal ensembles. As well as maintaining a busy international

touring and recording schedule with EXAUDI, he works regularly as a guest conductor with instrumental ensembles and orchestras such as the Royal Northern Sinfonia, BBC Singers, Explore Ensemble, Talea, London Sinfonietta, musikFabrik and L'Instant Donné.

James Weeks was Associate Head of Composition at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama (2012–17) and took up his present position as Associate Professor of Composition at Durham University in 2017.

EXAUDI

Juliet Fraser soprano
Sophie Overin mezzo-soprano
Tom Williams countertenor
Stephen Jeffes tenor
Michael Hickman baritone
Ben McKee bass

EXAUDI is one of the world's leading new-music vocal ensembles. It was formed in 2002 and comprises some of the UK's top ensemble singers and new-music soloists. It has collaborated with hundreds of composers, from today's leading figures to the stars of tomorrow, blazing new trails in contemporary vocal composition.

The group's particular affinity is for the radical edges of repertoire both new and old, from medieval and Renaissance music to that of the 21st century. It champions composers as diverse as Cassandra Miller, Michael Finnissy, Jürg Frey, Catherine Lamb, Evan Johnson, Georges Aperghis and Naomi Pinnock. Its programming frequently mixes early and new music in imaginative and arresting combinations: new female perspectives on Gesualdo and the Italian madrigal, or James Weeks's reimagining of Arcadelt in his *Book of Flames and Shadows*.

EXAUDI is also strongly involved with the emerging generation of young composers and singers, and regularly takes part in artist development schemes and residencies such as Voix Nouvelles Royaumont and IRCAM Manifeste Académie. It has particularly strong links with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Durham University. The ensemble has also signed up to the Keychange initiative, pledging gender-equal programming across its own-promotion activities.

Its many international engagements include appearances at MusikFest Berlin, Wien Modern, Wittener Tage, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Darmstadter Ferienkurse, Musica Viva, Munich, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, IRCAM, Festival d'Automne, Paris, Rainy Days, Luxembourg, Voix Nouvelles, Royaumont and L'Auditori, Barcelona, among others. It has also collaborated with many leading ensembles, including musikFabrik, Ensemble Modern, L'Instant Donné, London Sinfonietta, BCMG, Talea, Linea, Helsinki Philharmonic and Ensemble Intercontemporain.

In the UK EXAUDI has appeared at the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh, Aberdeen's Sound, Spitalfields, Manchester International Festival and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and at Wigmore Hall, Café OTO, Kings Place and the Southbank Centre. It broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 and European radio stations, and has released 20 critically acclaimed recordings on a variety of labels.

Explore Ensemble

Taylor MacLennan flute 1

Frederico Paixão flute 2

Alex Roberts clarinet 1

Kenny Keppel clarinet 2

Sarah Park piano 1

Ben Smith piano 2

Eloisa-Fleur Thom violin 1a

Amy Tress violin 1b

Gemma Sharples violin 2a

Zahra Benyounes violin 2b

Christine Anderson viola 1

Dominic Stokes viola 2

Deni Teo cello 1

Sérgio Serra Lopez cello 2

Cecilia De Maria celtic harp

Nicholas Moroz electric guitar

Explore Ensemble is a London-based group that performs, commissions and promotes new music throughout the UK and internationally. Based around a core sextet that often incorporates electronics and video, Explore Ensemble's reputation for outstanding performances and inventive curation reflects its advocacy of composers of today, combined with its revival of landmark works from the recent past, and premiere recordings of new music. In 2021 Explore Ensemble was awarded the internationally

prestigious Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung Ensemble Prize.

Since its founding in 2012 at the Royal College of Music by composers Nicholas Moroz and Arne Gieshoff, Explore Ensemble has appeared at festivals and venues throughout the UK and beyond, including Centro Pecci Prato (Italy), Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Spitalfields Festival, London Contemporary Music Festival, Aldeburgh Festival and No Bounds (all UK), Transit (Belgium), November Music (Netherlands), Rainy Days (Luxembourg), Schleswig-Holstein and ZKM Karlsruhe (both Germany) and Schlossmediale (Switzerland), as well as at home in London at Wigmore Hall, Kings Place and Café OTO.

Explore Ensemble has released several critically acclaimed recordings, most recently Mark Fell's *Psychic Resynthesis* and Beatrice Dillon's *Seven Reorganisations* on her new label HI. The ensemble's 2023 album, *Perfect Offering*, showcases music by Cassandra Miller, Lisa Illean, Rebecca Saunders and Lawrence Dunn, while *parallaxis forma*, its portrait album of Catherine Lamb's music with EXAUDI and Lotte Betts-Dean on *Another Timbre* has also been highly praised. Other releases include portrait albums of music by Oliver Leith (*Me Hollywood*) and James Weeks (*Summer*), both on *Another Timbre*.

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