

Hauschka

Start time: 8pm

Set times: 90 minutes plus encore

All times are approximate and subject to change.

Arwa Haider speaks to the pianist and composer ahead of his performance at the Barbican.

'My solo music is just like my wild nature. I can just run where I want to, set my tent in the fields anywhere, sleep wherever I want to, and take a snapshot and show the world.' – Hauschka

Celebrated pianist, film composer (including his Oscar-nominated *Lion* score) and artist Hauschka, aka Volker Bertelmann has crafted an extensive, deeply atmospheric music catalogue over the past fifteen years, becoming particularly renowned for his innovative approaches to classical instrumentation. Since the release of his breakthrough album *The Prepared Piano* (2005), Hauschka has taken 'traditional' keys into intrepid contemporary territories, transforming its sounds by placing various items (from electric motors to household objects) on or between the instrument's strings, hammers and dampers to create percussive, orchestral and sustained effects. Hauschka's creative range reflects his diverse background (he grew up making music across genres from rock to hip hop), as well as his long-held love for the piano in its purest form – and the latter passion becomes the focus of his latest album, *A Different Forest*, and tonight's live performance at Milton Court.

'When I started playing prepared piano, I wasn't looking at what other people were doing,' he explains. 'I wanted to be associated with electronic music, and I was looking for cool textures and beats that I could use. I wanted to create something that I could play in a club or a classical venue.'

A Different Forest draws from multi-layered themes of the natural world, as well as a 'back to nature' organic approach to the piano itself, played here without additional adornment or preparation. This is not the first time that nature has provided inspiration for Hauschka's compositions; take his acclaimed previous album *What If* (2017), which included the evocative track 'Nature Fights Back'. It was during the Berlin recording of this last LP that Hauschka found himself reflecting again on the intrinsic beauty of the Steinway piano in the studio, as well as looking further back throughout his own life experiences.

'I grew up in a small village in Germany [Ferndorf, which gave its name to his fourth album in 2008], where nature was very close,' he explains. 'Nature gives you a lot of opportunities to reflect on yourself, and the life decisions you take. Maybe it makes you see what is really necessary.'

While the stripped-back direction on *A Different Forest* presents a sharp contrast from Hauschka's earlier works, the new material still exudes his characteristic style of playing: sensitive, intricate, emotive and lushly beautiful. There is an immediacy to many of these melodies, as well as wonderfully vivid details in pieces such as 'Dew And Spiderwebs' and 'Hands In The Anthill'. Hauschka has always woven intensely personal influences into his music, and another highlight here is the warmly evocative 'Talking To My Father', which recalls the lengthy countryside walks he would take with his dad, during which time father and son could take in the scenic landscapes and speak freely with each other, away from mundane pressures.

'The cliché is that men aren't talkative about their emotions, but my father and I would have the best conversations on these walks, just because there was time to be next to each other,' says Hauschka.

For tonight's solo performance, Hauschka's piano works are powerfully offset by visuals from Scottish artist Florence To, who creates what Hauschka describes as 'textural sculptures, or a kind of sound installation.' He explains: 'The preparations have disappeared from the piano itself, but they're still in the space surrounding me.'

A Different Forest represents a realm of contemplation and progression, as well as a place to reappraise our everyday surroundings; rather than retreating to a rural location to create these pieces, Hauschka immersed himself in febrile urban settings around the world ('When I close my eyes, I'm in

barbican

nature,' he murmurs). It's evidenced in tracks such as 'Daybreak Over Covent Garden', which relates to the surprisingly tranquil walks he would take through the centre of London at dawn. 'I refer to cities where you can experience natural sensations,' he says. 'At 5.30am, it's very calm and you can hear birdsong, before the craziness of the city day really begins.'

Tonight's show will also feature compositions from Hauschka's earlier albums; as Hauschka's music continues to move forward, he also stays true to his heartfelt roots.

'I've never been into the approach where things just get "bigger and bigger",' he says. 'The gadgets are not disappearing forever... I'm just widening the spectrum.'

Performers

Volker Bertelmann

Produced by the Barbican



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