

Joyce DiDonato: Eden

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate running time: 90 minutes with no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Programme

Charles Ives *The Unanswered Question*

Rachel Portman *The First Morning of the World* (UK premiere*)

Gustav Mahler 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft' from *Rückert-Lieder*

Biagio Marini 'Con le stelle in ciel che mai' from *Scherzi e canzonette*

Josef Mysliveček 'Toglierò le sponde al mare' from *Adamo ed Eva*

Aaron Copland 'Nature, the Gentlest Mother' from *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson*

Giovanni Valentini *Sonata enharmonica*

Francesco Cavalli 'Piante ombrose' from *La Calisto*

Christoph Willibald Gluck 'Danza degli spettri e delle furie: Allegro non troppo' from *Orfeo ed Euridice*

Christoph Willibald Gluck 'Misera, dove son... Ah! non son io che parlo' from *Ezio*

George Frideric Handel 'As with rosy steps the morn' from *Theodora*

Gustav Mahler 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' from *Rückert-Lieder*

Joyce DiDonato's latest project is nothing if not ambitious. James Drury finds out more.

'It is an overture to contemplate the sheer perfection of the world around us, and to explore whether or not we are connecting as profoundly as we can to the pure essence of our being,' writes the globally esteemed mezzo-soprano.

The idea came to her five years ago and was initially a 'preachy' and 'militant' call to arms about climate change, but evolved into something more universal that goes beyond that to ask us to embrace our role as part of nature. 'There's this disconnect within people at large, within communities, within nations, that we're not taking care of each other,' she told the Irish Times. 'And that's the bigger question that EDEN morphed into in these last two years,'

As well as a concert tour and album, EDEN also includes outreach work with schools. The project's catchline 'One song, one seed' aims to plant seeds of change in people's minds as we revel in the mezzo-soprano's broad choices of music. To that end – and somewhat more literally – you'll have received a corn poppy seed, which DiDonato would like you to plant. 'They were once a familiar sight in arable fields but modern farming methods have made them much less common,' she says, explaining why these were chosen for Barbican audiences.

She hopes as a result of this project people will 'look how much extraordinary benevolence there is in the world around us; let's participate in building that up and taking care of that'.

The driving force behind this mission is DiDonato's relentless optimism (she laughs she sometimes belligerently clings to this trait). Renowned as an activist, she says 'I know music can save lives, heal deep wounds, unify communities, and can bring real hope and comfort in the darkest hour. This is why I am an activist.' She's taken part in prison outreach work in the USA, is an active advocate for music education through El Sistema, which has changed the lives of more than 700,000 children in Venezuela, and uses her platform to champion social change.

EDEN opens with Charles Ives' *The Unanswered Question*. On a trip to Brazil for the development of the project, conductor Maxim Emelyanychev suggested the 20th century American experimentalist composer's piece. 'I went, "We can't do Charles Ives, what are you talking about?";' recalls the Kansas-born singer. 'He started to play this music. I'd never heard it before and the minute it started, I was transported into the cosmos. I didn't dare breathe for the four and a half minutes it was playing...we all got goosebumps and said "that's how we start".'

This breath-taking work begins with a solo voice posing what sounds like a question that goes unanswered until the wind section strikes up with an almost robotic response. The original voice seems to persist, asking again and again, and the answers come with a little more impatience, a growing sense of disagreement among themselves as they become discordant.

barbican

DiDonato says: 'What I love about it is it's putting us in a place that's slightly outside of ourselves; it's giving that energy we all have: why am I here, what's happening to me, what are we doing to ourselves? We all have so many questions in our head right now and this piece is somehow calming but so human.'

Following this extraordinary opening is the UK premiere of *The First Morning of the World* written by Academy Award-winning English composer Rachel Portman with libretto by Gene Scheer, who frequently works with DiDonato's long-time collaborator Jake Heggie.

Knowing that his new piece comes after *The Unanswered Question*, Sheer's first line is 'There is a language without question marks; you can read it in the rings of trees and in the wind and in the river and in the sound of birds singing. Has their song changed from the first morning of the world?' It then takes us on a journey of more questions, asking for the grace to be able to speak that language.

'It was very important for us in this project to create a new piece and to have the birth of something, because the whole thing is about planting seeds, putting seeds of music, ideas, questions, maybe even answers along the way and seeing what fruit comes from them,' says DiDonato. 'Rachel is such a beautifully sensitive, attuned human being and composer. That searching and sensitivity comes through her music.'

'This project and this piece is a call to remember that this language exists, that we're a part of it, and the gifts and the revelations that come to us if we can open back up and value, listen and engage with it. This isn't just about avoiding climate disaster, it's about giving ourselves the fullness of the life that's here now, and connecting to that. I find that when I listen to a story, when I'm carried away by music, it connects me to that glimpse a little bit longer. That's what we want to build.'

© James Drury

Performers

Joyce DiDonato executive producer and mezzo-soprano

Maxim Emelyanychev conductor and harpsichord

Manuel Palazzo actor

Marie Lambert-Le Bihan stage director

John Torres lighting designer

il Pomo d'Oro

violin I

Zefira Valova

Edson Scheid

Dmitry Lepekhov

Laura Andriani

Jesus Merino

violin II

Nicholas Robinson

Lucia Giraudo

Elena Abbati

Valentina Mattiussi

Katarzyna Olszewska

viola

Giulio D'Alessio

Max Mandel

Archimede De Martini

cello

Ludovico Minasi

Natalia Timofeeva

double bass

Maria Vahervuo

Attila Szilági

Miguel Rincon theorbo

Eva Ivanova flute

Christopher Palameta oboe

Francesco Spendolini clarinet

Alejandro Perez Marin bassoon

horn

David Fliri

Achim Schmid-Egger

EDEN engagement managers and partnership liaisons

Sophie Dand
Rachel Walters

Askonas Holt tour management
Colin Murphy production manager
Adrien Rigal stage manager
Valentin Bodier LX board operator
Javi Castrillon set technician

Set Created by Escenografia Moia
Sergi Galera Nebot technical director
Joan Font design consultant

partners

International Teaching Artists Collaborative
Botanical Gardens Conservation International

Seeds provided by Botanical Gardens Conservation International

Bishop Ramsey CE School Choir & Music Centre London Choir
'Seeds of Hope'
Composed by the Children of the Canterbury Choir, Bishop Ramsey CE School, England, with Mike Roberts

*Commissioned by University Musical Society of the University of Michigan; the Harriman-Jewell Series, Kansas City; Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation; and Cal Performances at University of California, Berkeley

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Produced by the Barbican

The First Morning of the World (Gene Scheer)

There's a language without question marks.
You can read it in the rings of trees.
And in the wind and the river.
And in the sound of birds singing.
Has their song changed since they sang it once in
Eden?
Oh, to understand the language of the trees...
the grammar of the earth...
the sounds and the songs from the first morning of
the world.
But I am filled with nothing but questions.
And each one is bound together like logs on a raft,
Taking me down the river mile by mile.
Ever further away from the mountain top.
Ever further away from the borders of my heart.
Ever further away... away... away...
Away from the first morning of the world.
There is a torn map in my clenched fist.
On it is marked where I have been
And where I want to go.
But this moment is not on any map.
It is in the rings of trees.
In the wind and the river.
It is in the sound of birds singing as they did in Eden.
In the songs on the first morning of the world.
Oh tree, Oh, bird, Oh, world. Oh, all of you...
Oh, forgotten garden! I am here.
Touch me. Teach me to sing notes that bloom like a
canopy of leaves,
Meant to do nothing but feel the sun.

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Ich atmet' einen linden Duft (Friedrich Rückert)

Ich atmet' einen linden Duft.
Im Zimmer stand
Ein Zweig der Linde,
Ein Angebinde von lieber Hand;
Wie lieblich war der Lindenduft!
Wie lieblich ist der Lindenduft!
Das Lindenreis
Brachst du gelinde;
Ich atme leis
Im Duft der Linde
Der Liebe linden Duft.

I breathed a gentle fragrance

I breathed a gentle fragrance!
In the room stood
A spray of lime,
A gift from a dear hand;
How lovely the fragrance of lime was!
How lovely the fragrance of lime is!
The spray of lime
Was gently plucked by you!
Softly I breathe
In the fragrance of lime
The gentle fragrance of love.

Con le stelle in ciel che mai (Anon.)

Con le stelle in ciel che mai
Vidi il Sol spiegar i rai?
Chi tra gelo nel suo stelo
Amoroso star la rosa,
Tra tempest', e tra procelle
Lampeggiar amiche stelle?

Ecco uscir del sol il sole,
E di Dio l'immensa prole
Tra gli orrori spuntari fiori;
O bel lampo, o del campo
Fior che sol fa primavera
E de l'or l'età primiera.

Casti amanti, ecco senz'ali
Ecco Amor senz'arco e strali,
Che nel seno di vil fieno
Freddo giace, senza face:
Ma se scalda il core argente,
E che poi sarebbe ardente.

Nudo fere, e disarmato,
Che faria poi faretrato
Con que sguardi mille dardi
Da begl'occhi par che scocchi,
E le calde lagrimelle
Son faville, e al cor facelle.

S'apre poi le labbra al riso,
Rose dà di Paradiso,
S'altri puote ne le gotte
Vagheggiarele senz'amarle,
Sù, sù prendi arco, e faretra,
Casto Amore, e'l cor mi spetra.

Hor' al mondo il grand' Augusto,
Signoreggio – io nel angusto
Aero speco vivrò teco,
Dove invite co' i vegiti,
Che s'è culla al tuo natale,
A me sia tomba vitale

Togliere le sponde al mare (Giovanni Granelli)

Togliere le sponde al mare,
Perderò cittadi e genti!
Acque pria, poi fiamme ardenti:
Alti danni e piaghe amare
Sulla terra spargerò!

Ah, mia spada, e di qual sangue
Finalmente andrai vermiglia?
Vela, o luna, al sol le ciglia!
Trema, o terra: estinto, esangue
Mira il dio che ti creò!

Who has ever seen the sun

Who has ever seen the sun
Spread its rays in the firmament?
Who has seen a lovely rose on frozen ground
Stand upright on its stem?
Who has seen through storms and tempests
The friendly stars twinkle?

Here the sun rises from the ground,
And the offspring of God's great fecundity,
Flowers now blossom amid the horror;
O fair lightning, O flower of the field
That alone brings springtime
And the first Golden Age.

Chaste lovers, here is Cupid
Without wings, bows or arrows.
He lies in the humble hay,
Cold and without a light:
But if his frozen heart once warms,
How will it then burn!

He was naked and unnamed,
But what would he have done with a quiver,
When with those glances he seems
To shoot a thousand darts from his fine eyes,
And his hot tears
Are sparks that illumine hearts.

If then he opens his lips to laugh,
He brings forth roses of Paradise;
If someone gazes on his cheeks
Without desire or love,
Come, take up bow and quiver,
Chaste Cupid, and soften my heart.

While great Augustus reigns on earth,
I in a narrow unsheltered cave
Shall live with you,
Lured there by your moans,
For if it be a cradle for your birth,
May it be for me a living tomb.

I shall remove the sea from its shores

I shall remove the sea from its shores,
I shall erase cities and peoples!
Waters first, then burning flames:
Sore destruction, bitter plagues
I shall scatter across the globe!

Ah, my sword, whose blood
Will turn you red at last?
Veil, O moon, your countenance from the sun!
Quake, O earth: lifeless and bloodless,
Behold the god who created you!

Nature – the Gentlest Mother (Emily Dickinson)

Nature – the Gentlest Mother,
Impatient of no Child –
The feeblest – or the waywardest –
Her Admonition mild –

In Forest – and the Hill –
By Traveller – is heard –
Restraining Rampant Squirrel –
Or too impetuous Bird –

How fair Her Conversation –
A Summer Afternoon –
Her Household – Her Assembly –
And when the Sun go down –

Her Voice among the Aisles
Incites the timid prayer
Of the minutest Cricket –
The most unworthy Flower –

When all the Children sleep –
She turns as long away
As will suffice to light Her lamps –
Then bending from the Sky –

With infinite Affection –
And infiniter Care –
Her Golden finger on Her lip –
Wills Silence – Everywhere –

Piante ombrose (Giovanni Faustini)

Piante ombrose,
Dove sono i vostri onori?
Vaghi fiori
Dalla fiamma inceneriti,
Colli e liti,
Di smeraldi già coperti,
Or deserti
Del bel verde, io vi sospiro:
Dove giro,
Calda, il piede e sitibonda,
Trovo l'onda
Rifuggita entro la fonte,
Né la fronte
Bagnar posso, o 'l labbro ardente.
Inclemente:
Sì, sì, chi tuona arde la terra?
Non più, Giove, ah non più Guerra!

Shady woodlands

Shady woodlands,
Where now is your beauty?
Radiant flowers,
Now a withered heap of ash,
Hills and shores
Once covered in emerald
But now bereft
Of your fair foliage – I grieve for you.
Wherever I turn,
Hot and thirsty,
I find the brooklets
Have fled back to their source
And I cannot bathe
My brow or burning lips.
Does the god of thunder
So mercilessly scorch the earth?
No more, Jove, ah, no more war!

Misera, dove son? . . . Ah! non son io che parlo (Pietro Metastasio)

Recitative

Misera, dove son? L'aure del Tebro
Son queste ch'io respiro?
Per le strade m'aggio
Di Tebe e d'Argo? O dalle greche sponde,
Di tragedie feconde,
Le domestic furie
Vennero a questi lidi,
Della prole di Cadmo e degli Atridi?
Là, d'un monarca ingiusto
L'ingrata crudeltà m'empie d'orrore,
D'un padre traditore
Qua la colpa m'agghiaccia:
E lo sposo innocente ho sempre in faccia.
Oh immagini funeste!
Oh memorie! Oh martiro!
Ed io parlo, infelice, ed io respiro?

Aria

Ahi! Non son io che parlo,
È il barbaro dolore
Che mi divide il core,
Che delirar mi fa.

Non cura il ciel tiranno
L'affanno, in cui mi vedo:
Un fulmine gli chiedo,
E un fulmine non ha.

As with rosy steps the morn (Thomas Morell, after Robert Boyle)

As with rosy steps the morn,
Advancing, drives the shades of night,
So from virtuous toil well-borne,
Raise Thou our hopes of endless light.
Triumphant Saviour, Lord of day,
Thou art the life, the light, the way!

Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen (Friedrich Rückert)

Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen,
Mit der ich sonst viele Zeit verdorben.
Sie hat so lange nichts von mir vernommen,
Sie mag wohl glauben, ich sei gestorben.
Es ist mir auch gar nichts daran gelegen,
Ob sie mich für gestorben hält.
Ich kann auch gar nichts sagen dagegen,
Denn wirklich bin ich gestorben der Welt.
Ich bin gestorben dem Weltgetümmel,
Und ruh' in einem stillen Gebiet.
Ich leb' allein in meinem Himmel,
In meinem Lieben, in meinem Lied.

Alas, where am I? . . . Ah, it is not I who speak

Recitative

Alas, where am I? Is this the air
Of Tiber that I breathe?
Do I wander through the streets
Of Thebes and Argos?
Or have domestic furies,
Sprung from the race of Cadmus and the Atridae,
Come to these shores of ours from Greece,
That has spawned so many tragedies.
The cruelty of a wicked monarch
Fills my soul with horror,
The treacherous deed of a father
Causes my blood to run cold;
And I always see before me
My innocent betrothed. Ah, baleful images!
Ah memories, ah torment!
And yet I, unhappy woman, can live and breathe?

Aria

Alas! It is not I who speaks,
But the wrenching grief
That breaks my heart asunder
And renders me insane.

Heaven is insensible
To my despair:
I beg it for a thunderbolt
And it has none to send.

I am lost to the world

I am lost to the world
With which I used to waste much time;
It has for so long heard nothing of me,
It may well believe I am dead.
Nor am I at all concerned
If it should think me dead.
Nor can I deny it,
For truly I am dead to the world.
I am dead to the world's tumult
And rest in a quiet realm.
I live alone in my heaven,
In my loving, in my song.

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