

# Father John Misty with Britten Sinfonia Conducted by Jules Buckley

**Start time:** 8pm

**Approximate running time:** 90 minutes, no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

## **Martin Aston takes a look at the enigmatic Father John Misty; and talks to conductor Jules Buckley about this performance.**

The show that *Variety* magazine labelled 'Father John Misty and LA Philharmonic Make Sad Magic', when the American singer-songwriter played the Walt Disney Concert Hall in late February arrives at the Barbican for a one-off UK performance, uniting the artist born Josh Tillman and his seven-piece band with the 35-piece Britten Sinfonia and conductor Jules Buckley.

The London show is timed with the release of Father John Misty's fifth album, *Chloe And The Next 20th Century*, a luscious, languid beauty performed by Tillman, guitarist/co-producer Jonathan Wilson and keyboard specialist/arranger Drew Erickson, backed by a full complement of strings, brass and woodwind but also vibraphone, fiddle, percussion and harp. It's not the first time that Misty has employed orchestration on record and stage, but not to the extent of this latest venture.

'Singer-songwriters who take the live orchestral route can be an eyebrow-raiser, but with Father John's style of singing and melodic approach, it makes total sense,' says Buckley, Creative Artist in Association with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and honorary conductor of the Metropole Orkest following his Grammy-winning stint as Chief Conductor (2013 - 2020).

'Lyrically, he's phenomenal too,' Buckley continues. 'It just feels insanely honest, and melancholic, which particularly resonates with me. There's humour in there too, but in a deep and not tacky way.' Buckley is an equal fan of the album's sonic architecture. 'In a time when music can be so heavily produced, *Chloe And The Next 20th Century* has a lot of space in it, which really appeals to me. I'm super-excited about this project.'

As for the artist, Tillman has only given one interview since he promoted his third album *Pure Comedy* (2015), and that was a set of short written responses to advance questions for *Uncut* magazine's lead review of *Chloe And The Next 20th Century*. Tillman gave little away besides factual information: what was the central theme or emotion for the album? 'Obsolescence.' How would he summarise the album in a sentence? 'The ever-present past.'

Asked about how the track 'Buddy's Rendezvous' came about, Tillman wrote, 'This seems like good moment to acknowledge how incredible Drew Erickson is as a pianist and arranger. On this record you've got these stories where a big part of the picture is being painted by what's happening in the track and I've got Drew's ear and sensibility to thank for those coming off.' Finally, did the original concept of Father John Misty - an exaggerated version of his real self - still hold true or have things moved on from there, and if so, how? 'This sounds like I'm being evaluated for release from a facility,' he wrote.

Presumably Tillman felt he'd provided the necessary insight, or had over-explained himself, in the various lengthy interviews he had given between the release of his Father John Misty debut album *Fear Fun* (2012) and his last in-person chat following his third album *Pure Comedy* in 2015, absenting himself completely when he released his fourth album *God's Favourite Customer* (2018).

Given his lyrics dealt with, in *The Guardian's* words, 'ambiguity, nuance, the tap-dance between irony and sincerity' and what Tillman himself described as 'all the postmodern metafiction and the pastiche and the intertextuality, all that mumbo-jumbo in the music,' there was bound to be misinterpretation, and debates over authenticity.

Here was an artist who had released eight much starker, Americana-influenced albums between 2003 and 2010 under the name of J Tillman, before an incident that can be summarised as 'Tillman takes hallucinogens in the desert, climbs a tree and has an epiphany', which lead to a change in name and sound. Father John Misty was a particularly verbose, often surreal and stream-of-consciousness chronicler of a particular LA state of mind; the heart of entertainment, the quintessential American dream, of palm trees and ennui, freak weather and end-of-days vibes. Suitably, his music now echoed classic LA singer-songwriters such as Jimmy Webb, Randy Newman and Harry Nilsson; romantic and cynical, generous and misanthropic; mocking wit and vulnerable confession in equal measure.

But far from an alter ego, or playing a part, he claimed that Father John Misty was much closer to his real self than when he went by his own name. He told *Loud & Quiet*, 'Starting doing this thing [Father John Misty], for some reason some sort of portal opened up to eight-year-old me, where I felt like I could bypass all of this misdirection and distortion that was going on in my twenties and reconnect with these fundamental aspects of myself.'

Best to avoid self-justification, then, and let the songs do the talking. He told *The Guardian*, 'The music is the times I can get my head above the water and make something out of it. All I can do is quote my own lyrics. Those are the truest things I will ever say.'

The Barbican show will include old favourites, such as 'Funtimes In Babylon' from *Fear Fun* and 'The Night Josh Tillman Came To Our Apartment' from his second album *I Love You Honeybear*. but a strong selection from *Chloe And The Next 20th Century*, including 'Buddy's Rendezvous', 'Goodbye Mr. Blue', 'Only A Fool', 'Kiss Me (I Loved You)' and 'The Next 20th Century'. For this creative exercise in, 'the ever-present past,' some songs tap the nostalgic motherlode of 30s/40s big-band swing and romantic ballads, like an update of the Great American Songbook, which has upped the ante even further for tonight's conductor. Says Buckley, 'Coming up though studying jazz trumpet, I did a deep dive on all orchestrations, for example by Nelson Riddle, so I can relate to those arrangements, and how Father John's team has approached it, led by his musical director Kelly Pratt.'

Whatever the motives of Father John Misty, J Tillman or Josh Tillman, rest assured that tonight's performers will showcase some of that sad, but equally uplifting, magic in what promises to be a sensational night.

barbican

## Performers

**Josh Tillman** vocals, guitar, piano

**Daniel Bailey** drums

**Chris Darley** guitar

**Matt Douglas** horns

**Kyle Flynn** keyboard

**Kelly Pratt** horns

**Eli Thomson** bass

**Jon Titterington** piano

**David Vandervelde** guitars

## Britten Sinfonia

**Jules Buckley** conductor

**Jacqueline Shave** violin I

**Katherine Shave**

**Fiona McCapra**

**Martin Gwilym-Jones**

**Clara Biss**

**Miranda Dale** violin II

**Nicola Goldscheider**

**Anna Bradley**

**Judith Stowe**

**Joanna Watts**

**Clare Finnimore** violas

**Bridget Carey**

**Rachel Byrt**

**Rachel Robson**

**Ben Chappell** cellos

**Joy Hawley**

**Julia Vohralik**

**Juliet Welchman**

**Sarah O'Flynn** flute

**Frederico Paixão**

**Peter Facer** oboe

**Joy Farrall** clarinets

**Oliver Pashley**

**Oliver Pashley** bass clarinet

**Christian Forshaw** alto saxophone

**Sarah Burnett** bassoon

**Mike Lovatt** trumpets

**Andy Gathercole**

**Trevor Mires** trombones

**Alistair White**

**Jeremy Cornes** timpani

**Owen Gunnell** percussion

**Sally Pryce** harp

Produced by the Barbican



The City of London  
Corporation is the founder  
and principal funder  
of the Barbican Centre