

Sō Percussion with Caroline Shaw

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 9.40pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

Angélica Negrón *Gone*

Go Back

Julia Wolfe *Forbidden Love*

Caroline Shaw Selections from *Narrow Sea*

Caroline Shaw and Sō Percussion Selections from *Let the Soil Play its Simple Part*

Sō Percussion and Caroline Shaw come together to push music beyond its boundaries.

The creative roots and shoots of Pulitzer-winning composer, violinist, vocalist and producer Caroline Shaw and contemporary chamber innovators Sō Percussion have proved excitingly far-ranging over the years, across unconventional instrumentation and unconstrained styles. These New York-based artists have also connected and entwined in various enticing ways – having originally met as grad students at Yale, and then at Princeton, where Sō members (then performers-in-residence) presented a course on writing for percussion.

‘We designed a year-long experience where composers work through a number of playing techniques and instruments,’ recalls Sō’s Adam Sliwinski. ‘Caroline was enamoured of flowerpots, which became a motif she has employed in every piece we do together.’

Around five years ago, Sō asked Shaw to write a piece for them with the US soprano Dawn Upshaw, which became *Narrow Sea*: a gorgeously flowing, folky and hymnal five-part work, which would lend its title to a Grammy-winning 2021 release on Nonesuch Records; this collection would also feature an earlier Sō/Shaw collaboration, the unexpectedly stirring *Taxidermy* (which does indeed feature flowerpots). The recording process for *Narrow Sea* also gave rise to another batch of collaborative songs, and Shaw’s second widely acclaimed album of 2021: the richly earthy melodies and otherworldly ambience of *Let The Soil Play Its Simple Part*.

Tonight’s live performance reunites Sō Percussion (Sliwinski alongside bandmates Jason Treuting, Josh Quillen and Eric Cha-Beach) with Shaw, to embrace all the sonic possibilities of their collaborative material, in the atmospheric setting of Milton Court Concert Hall.

Shaw explains: ‘What I love about Sō is the curiosity about how objects make sounds and how they speak to each other. [There was an] underlying thread of thinking about what goes into soil, how we take care of it, how we allow it to be itself, how we contain it, and what can come out of it if you cultivate the right environment, which for me is always this wonderful metaphor for creativity and collaboration: let people be themselves and see what happens.’

Sō Percussion will also open the set with two contrasting examples of their collaborative works. Angélica Negrón’s absorbing, impulsive *Gone* (2018) and *Go Back* (2022) has a playful edge, with Sō incorporating Bricolo robotic instruments designed by Nick Yulman. Julia Wolfe’s *Forbidden Love* (2019) is a kind of serenade to stepping out of the box, described by Wolfe as ‘all the things you aren’t supposed to do to string instruments’.

‘The works on this concert represent some of the experiments we are most proud of over the last few years: Negrón’s robots, Wolfe’s modified string quartet, and Shaw’s song forms each extend the idea of what percussion can mean,’ enthuses Sliwinski. ‘Each also represents a deep collaboration – it would be impossible to imagine any of them arriving in the mail without an extensive process of development first.’

‘Julia invented an entirely new vocabulary of sounds and gestures on string instruments with us together in the room, involving bowing with string, playing with thimbles, and both drawing and striking with chopsticks. Angélica’s robots perform precisely timed actions that coincide with what we play. Caroline’s *Narrow Sea* was workshopped extensively before the final version, and our album *Let the Soil Play its Simple Part* was co-composed.’

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Numerous beguiling details unfold within these sound worlds. *Let The Soil...* combines original lyrics with the yearning expressions of 18th-century spirituals, excerpts from James Joyce's 1922 literary opus *Ulysses* (on *The Flood Is Following Me*), and perhaps most surprisingly, a heady retake of ABBA's 1980 Scandi-pop stormer *Lay All Your Love On Me*: here stripped back to a strangely timeless, emotionally raw choral.

'Each of us created a duet with Caroline for *Let the Soil...* and for mine we decided – it was her idea – to take ABBA's *Lay All Your Love...* eliminate the verses, slow it way down, and somehow make a medieval motet for voice and marimba,' says Sliwinski. 'It was the weirdest and most unexpected adaptation, and until I heard it all together in the studio I couldn't even tell if it was working or not. It turned out to be successful, and it creates kind of a lynchpin for the middle of the set of that music that I am extremely proud of.'

Shaw has described this reinterpretation as 'really a Bach chorale', adding: 'Also, the idea of someone singing: "Don't go wasting your emotion/ Lay all your love on me/ Don't go sharing your devotion/ Lay all your love on me" over and over again very slowly, there's a certain tragedy in it. And then Adam did some absolutely exquisite layering that built this stunning world from the marimba.'

These collaborative sparks should prove particularly vivid throughout a set that reflects deep-rooted rapport and boundless vision, as Sliwinski says: 'The magic we have together comes out of the place where her incredible intuition for harmony, melody, and words meets with our rhythmic cycles. A number of songs on *Let the Soil*, like our opening song 'To the Sky', consist of exactly that: Jason's patterning creates a bed of propulsion, on top of which Caroline's melodies, vocoder harmonies, and text choices soar.'

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Produced by the Barbican

Performers

Sō Percussion

Joshua Quillen
Adam Sliwinski
Eric Cha-Beach
Jason Treuting

Caroline Shaw vocals

Let the Soil Play its Simple Part

To the Sky

So fades the lovely blooming flow'r
Frail solace of an hour
So soon our transient comforts fly
And pleasure blooms to die.

Is there no kind, no healing art
To soothe my anguished heart
Spirit of grace be ever nigh
Thy comforts not to die.

Let gentle patience smile on pain
Till hope revives again
Hope wipes the tear from sorrow's eye
And faith points to the sky.

Lyrics by Anne Steele
(source *The Sacred Harp Hymnal* 1760)

The Flood is Following Me

Rhythm begins, you see. I hear.

The flood is following me
The flood is following me

And it's almost a chorus but
Probably still a verse
Spins around

The flood is following me
The flood is following me.

Lyrics by James Joyce from *Ulysses* (1922)
& Caroline Shaw

Let the Soil play its Simple Part

every angle has its fabled
tangent tied behind the backs of
folded hours found about the
rounded corners
counted towards what never
quite arrived in time
an asymptote
a rhyme
unfurled and
further curling
further finding
cursive foiling
wrapped around
this mortal coil
let the soil
let the soil
let the soil
let the soil
let the soil play its simple part

Do you ever think of me?
I hope that you are well.
lyrically we seem to be
sympatically derived from
integers insistent on a
keen resistance

pen in hand you handed me
your altogether pen in hand
you handed me your further
curling further finding cursive
foiling wrapped around this mortal
coil let the soil let the soil let
the soil let the soilletthe
soilletthesoilletthesoilletthes o i
l l e t t h e s o i l let the soil
play its simple part.

Do you ever think of me?
I hope that you are well

Lyrics by Caroline Shaw

Long Ago We Counted

Ago, ago, ago
Time until
Ago, ago, ago
Hours fill
Long ago we counted
One, two, three, four, five, six

Ago, ago, ago, ago, ago
Hours find
Ago, ago, ago, ago, ago
Fit the line
Long ago we ...
One, three

Until, until, until
Side by side
Until, until, until
By and by

Again, again, again
Long ago we ...

One.

Lyrics by Caroline Shaw

Part 1 from *Narrow Sea*

I am a poor wayfaring stranger
While journeying through this world of woe
That there's no sickness, toil, or danger
In that bright land to which I go.

I'm going there to see my father
I'm going there no more to roam
I'm only going over Jordan
I'm only going over home.

I know dark clouds will gather over me
I know my way is rough and steep
Yet beauteous fields lie just before me.

I'm going there to see my mother
She said she'd meet me when I come
I'm only going over Jordan
I'm only going over home.

Lyrics from No 457 of *The Sacred Harp*
(source: Joseph Bever's *Christian Songster*, 1858)

A Gradual Dazzle

This
slow
day
moves
Along the room
I
hear
its
axles
go
A gradual dazzle
upon
the ceiling
Gives me that
racy
bluishyellow
feeling
As hours
blow
the wide
way
Down my afternoon.

Lyrics by Anne Carson from *Hopper: Confessions – 'Room in Brooklyn'*, published in *Men in the Off Hours* (2000)

Lay All Your Love On Me

Don't go wasting your emotion
Lay all your love on me.

Don't go sharing your devotion
Lay all your love on me.

Lyrics by Benny Andersson & Björn Ulvaeus
(ABBA)

Cast the Bells in Sand

Tolling are the versions of
Slight versions of the same
Varied similarities.

Cast the bells in the sand
Cast the bells in the sand
Cast the bells in the sand

A singular voice, alone
Is its own.

Lyrics by Josh Quillen

Some Bright Morning

Some bright morning
When this life is over
I'll fly away
To that home on that
celestial shore
I'll fly away

When the shadows
of this life are over,
I'll ...
Oh glory
Oh morning

When I die
Hallelujah by and by
I'll fly away.

Lyrics by Albert E Brumley from *I'll Fly Away*
(1929)

A Veil Awave Upon the Waves

Did not : no, no:
All is lost now
A veil awave upon the waves
Wait while you wait.

Lyrics by James Joyce from *Ulysses*

Other Song

Find where you go
Behind the glare
Is what I know
The melody climbs higher.

The song is in the fold
The harmony is cold
What's old is new
Is ever, ever told.

I go, I go ...

I go where you are
I know there is no
Assigned melody.

The song is in the fold
The harmony is cold
What's old is new is old
is ever, ever told.

The detail ...

Find the line
Find the line.

I go where you go.



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