

# Seven Septets

**Start time:** 7.30pm

**Approximate end time:** 8.50pm, with no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

## **A collective of outstanding contemporary music talents comes together for a live performance spanning classical, jazz and cutting-edge improvisation.**

The creative possibilities of a septet feel both intimate and thrillingly expansive – as a close-knit ensemble, a ‘little big band’ or a multi-instrumental generator for new innovations.

Seven Septets imaginatively extends the experience of a ‘spatially distanced’ live project that was presented at St John’s Smith Square by acclaimed soprano-composer and cellist Héloïse Werner (who has won widespread plaudits for the lucidity and intricacy of her repertoire, with her 2022 debut album *Phrases*, being described by *The Times* as an ‘engrossing exploration of the range of the human voice), cellist-composer Colin Alexander (who has worked across an array of musical traditions, and is also the founder of artist-led independent label and site October House Records), and BBC Jazz Award-winning and Mercury-nominated composer, pianist and organist Kit Downes (who has been described as ‘one of the finest pianists of his generation’ by *Jazzwise*).

‘It was a mixture of improv, and some of our own pieces integrated into the whole concept,’ explains Werner. ‘It was the first kind of big event that we put on post-lockdown, and we loved the project and the audience response, so we wanted to involve more people that we really love, across different instruments, backgrounds and styles, and expand from that starting point.’

Here, the line-up increases to comprise a septet of distinctly far-ranging artists who have earned widespread acclaim in their own right; all of them promise a captivatingly fluid approach to collaboration. Alongside Werner, Alexander and Downes, there is Jas Kayser: a drummer, percussionist, pianist and composer, whose prolific projects have taken her from London to Boston, New York and Panama City, and whose awards have included the Jazz FM Breakthrough Act of the year 2021. Multidisciplinary artist, percussionist and sound designer Angela Wai Nok Hui has created an impact within contemporary classical realms and beyond, with an intent to ‘explore and expand the boundaries of music, performance and sound art’. Cellist-composer, vocalist and theatre performer Laura Moody entwines storytelling narrative and transformative ritual in her music, and has presented it in settings from the International Handel Festival to underground club nights. ECM artist, multi-instrumentalist and composer/arranger/producer Fred Thomas has been hailed as ‘brilliant’ by *BBC Music Magazine* for his ‘extreme sensitivity to colour and nuance’.

‘We’ve all worked together previously in different contexts or groups, but this will be the first time with all of us collaborating on stage as a septet,’ says Werner.

‘For Seven Septets, we thought we’d bring in people who are simultaneously composers, performers and improvisers, as well as arrangers,’ explains Alexander. ‘For instance, Jas, as well as being a composer and phenomenal technical player, was an ideal person in this scenario where she would bring her own music as well as reworking other people’s compositions in the moment. So that was the thinking behind each of the selections.’

Werner adds that this format enables artists to explore their full range: ‘Laura and I both sing and play our instruments; Angela is super-versatile as an artist and plays all kinds of different percussion; Kit can take on so much without seeming dominating, and Colin plays the cello amazingly; Fred Thomas plays all the instruments you can imagine he could pick up!’

‘I would say that the personalities involved are very generous and relaxed about how they go about things,’ adds Alexander. ‘For this concert, there will be seven pieces, each led by one of us; it’s basically up to the artist how they want to use an existing piece of theirs that they’ve previously performed on a smaller scale, and create a new extended version, with everyone improvising around it all. It will really shift as the performance goes on.’

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'I find this kind of thing very enriching and very freeing,' enthuses Werner. 'I think everyone involved in the Milton Hall concert is so brilliant – I'm really keen to leap into what they're offering and respond to it. I think everyone is of the same mindset; there's an element of the unknown which might be scary in some circumstances, but there's also a base of trust and intuition here.'

Alexander agrees: 'For me, this is the most joyful kind of set-up in some respects, because there's this openness, for the audience as well as the people on stage. It will be very much about the strong ideas and the personalities of each of the artists coming across and being given space – and we're very fortunate that we've got such a beautiful space to do it in.'

'I'm excited by the intimacy of the venue, as well as the acoustics,' says Werner. 'Milton Court has got a really good balance – not too boomy; not too dry, making it really nice to sing in.' The setting should also accentuate the meditative atmosphere of *Seven Septets*, as she explains: 'It's still a super-chilled vibe, but it's very focused, in a way. When life is so crazy and busy all the time, it's just so nice to be immersed in that kind of environment.'

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## Performers

**Jas Kayser** drums/percussion

**Angela Wai Nok Hui** percussion

**Fred Thomas** percussion, cello & keys

**Kit Downes** cello & keys

**Héloïse Werner** cello & voice

**Laura Moody** cello & voice

**Colin Alexander** cello

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