

The Hermes Experiment & Shiva Feshareki

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

Oliver Leith *Uh huh, Yeah*

Stevie Wishart *Eurostar – a journey between cities in sound*

Mira Calix *DMe*

Jethro Cooke & The Hermes Experiment *Metropolis*

Shiva Feshareki *TRANSFIGURE*

Vibrant quartet The Hermes Experiment collaborate with one of today's most exciting classical contemporary composers.

Since its founding in 2014, The Hermes Experiment has made waves with its 'deliberately idiosyncratic' instrumentation, bold programming and characterful performances. This programme marks the ensemble's debut performance at the Barbican and features a substantial new work by Shiva Feshareki, co-commissioned by The Hermes Experiment and the Barbican. The concert is also dedicated to the memory of the artist and composer Mira Calix (1969–2022), whose richly playful *DMe* is performed this evening.

Soprano Héloïse Werner describes the first part of the performance as a form of 'sonic preparation' for the new work by Shiva Feshareki: 'the first half is about introducing the sound world of The Hermes Experiment and getting the audience ready for the immersive deep listening of Shiva's piece'. As such, the programme begins with Oliver Leith's *Uh huh, Yeah* (2019), a work that Werner describes as 'very calming, almost therapeutic to perform'. Setting no other text beyond the work's title, the piece is, in Leith's words, an 'expression of something confusing' which teeters 'between joy and sadness'. Leith imagines the musicians as 'an animatronic band... where these strange robot bears, mice and ducks perform the same music over and over again.' A sense of good-natured resignation hangs over the work, from the languorous slides in the double bass to the slow sink of the harp as its strings are one by one tuned down, eventually rendering the entire instrument a semitone flat. It is, as Leith suggests, as though the band is 'running out of batteries'.

Composed in 2016, Stevie Wishart's *Eurostar* is 'a journey in sound between cities'. The composer writes: 'searching out quiet parts of the train, I would sit between the carriages recording promising sounds of the undulating hums, clicks, and speed-shifts on my mobile phone and together with samples taken from the impressive array of YouTube recordings I composed a soundscape, something of a cinema d'oreille template, using these sounds one hears while being cocooned in this transit zone between London and Brussels.' This recorded soundscape was then meticulously transcribed into a musical score, from which the musicians perform and improvise, 'informed by the soundscape as a template'.

DMe by Mira Calix was commissioned by the Hermes Experiment in 2017. Werner speaks of Calix as 'a great friend and collaborator. She had this huge, open mind and a magical way of bringing together so many different things in her art. The score [of *DMe*] is beautiful to look at. Not only is it a great piece of music, it's also an artwork in itself.' *DMe* is testament to Calix's warmth, wit and creative invention. The piece takes as its raw material a series of anonymised Instagram conversations and emojis, transformed (in the composer's words) 'into a graphic score of red and black lines, of varying lengths and widths, transcribed directly from this formative conversation... It's a work of what I call devised improvisation, with moments that refer directly to noted music and lyrics, which have been assigned to the now anonymised banter... The concert hall, our social network.'

Metropolis (2015) is a semi-improvised collaborative work, created by Jethro Cooke and The Hermes Experiment. The piece centres around a series of field recordings made in London by Cooke, around which the ensemble weaves. Werner notes how a particular recording of Tower Bridge is a particular highlight: 'there are these amazing sounds when Tower Bridge lifts and falls and you hear all the mechanics of the thing – this huge sound.'

barbican

A long-form new work by composer and turntablist Shiva Feshareki, *TRANSFIGURE*, completes the programme. In conversation, Feshareki describes the work as shaped around 'several different journeys happening at the same time, which expand and collide in all sorts of different ways that we can't predict. I'm also really fascinated by this feeling I have when I perform with turntables – which is almost a trance-like state, or like a therapy or hypnosis session – and I wanted to work with this idea, but with instrumentalists and acoustic sounds as well, so finding ways for instrumentalists to reach this same frame of mind.'

Alongside a score for acoustic instruments, the piece uses a variety of cutting-edge ambisonic-immersive technologies which allows Feshareki 'to create and mix electronic sounds on the turntables then move them round the space. It creates a truly immersive effect – the audience can feel this intangible sound moving everywhere, floating like ghosts.' In doing so, the work aims to draw the audience into a 'deep listening' experience, with the potential for its effects to flow beyond the concert hall. In the piece, the audience is invited to grow increasingly 'sensitive to how sound moves in space' and subsequently 'to take this out into the environment – listening to your surroundings and others in the same way as you listen in the concert hall – so the experience of the piece could also be a heightened way to experience the world.'

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Performers

The Hermes Experiment

Anne Denholm harp

Marianne Schofield double bass

Oliver Pashley clarinet

Héloïse Werner soprano

Shiva Feshareki turntables and immersive electronics

Produced by the Barbican



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