

The End of the World

ft. Lubomyr Melnyk, Julia Kent, Shards + SPIME.IM

Start time: 8pm

Approximate running time: 75 minutes, no interval.

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Arwa Haider catches up with Lubomyr Melnyk and members of SPIME.IM to discuss their data-driven, musical and audio-visual collaboration, which confronts the planet's ecological crisis and humanity's potential for redemption.

'This is a journey where you walk out the front door and have no destination ... but let life guide you and see where you go.'

Renowned Ukrainian composer and pianist Lubomyr Melnyk has earned his reputation for transformative work since the 1970s, both as a solo artist (and pioneer of intricate, immersive 'continuous music' techniques) and a far-ranging collaborator. Melnyk originally conceived *The End of the World* in 2018, as a reflection on climate change. Since then, this stand-alone work has given rise to a multi-stranded live audio-visual experience, created with Canadian cellist Julia Kent and Italian media art collective SPIME.IM, and is now presented at the Barbican for its UK premiere.

'This piece came out of the clouds... out of a ghost-like feeling that would very gradually take form and become more real before my eyes,' says Melnyk. 'With the concept of the death of the world in place, I envisioned a new segment: of sorrow and beauty, where the world reminisces about the beauty of its earlier life... this led me to the destruction, and all its gory ugliness... and the final mantra of hope.'

As Melnyk explains, it was an intuitive decision to work alongside Kent and SPIME.IM on this show: 'when I first heard SPIME.IM perform, I realised that they would be the ones to give a dynamic and powerful voice to the electronics, really dramatic and full of energy,' he says. 'And of course, I have loved Julia's ambient cello music for years. So, we all came together as a natural group.'

SPIME.IM (including members Davide Tomat, Gabriele Ottino, Marco Casolati and Matteo Marson) initially began working on this multimedia project remotely from their Turin-based Superbudda studio, during the pandemic lockdown era. As Ottino recalls, 'we were exploring the title and meaning of Melnyk's piece, at a time that felt like a tranquil end of the world. We were driven by Lubomyr's music, and his 'magical approach' to the realities we are facing, because he wanted to write a piece to heal the world from something bad.'

Audio-visual innovations have always powered SPIME.IM's work. The collective's backgrounds span Fine Art studies, graphic design, music production and video art. For *The End of the World*, they also applied science alongside Melnyk's 'magical approach', creating sounds and images based on analyses of environmental datasets.

'We worked with the data curator Elisa Bernardoni on information about climate change that could reflect the current state of the planet, through past and present data – and then also predictions of what this could mean in the years to come,' says Tomat.

Here, the current and historical data was transformed into ambient audio; the future parameters formed the basis of a choral score for the London-based experimental vocal

barbican

ensemble Shards. As Tomat explains, 'it became about transforming this very cold thing about numbers into something more human.'

The collaborative impact of the piece is tumultuous, gorgeously poignant and unexpectedly inspiring, suggesting humanity's potential for redemption as well as obvious destruction. Kent's electric and acoustic arrangements merge with Melnyk's inimitable melodies and SPIME.IM's heady sounds and visuals.

'We started from found footage of the natural world, and the idea was to 'corrupt' these images with videos from the human world, using 'datamoshing' techniques, much in the way that the human footprint corrupts nature: through pollution, warfare and so on,' says Marson. 'Then, in the second half of the show, we reverse the approach – so that cities are slowly eroded by nature growing out of buildings.'

'Working with Lubomyr and Julia, there are three worlds talking to each other, through different ways of making music, thinking, and periods of life,' says Tomat. 'It's like you feel the information moving from one generation to another.'

Melnyk's 'continuous music' technique creates a sustained, fluid sound stream, and highlights his ability to play exceptionally swift and subtle piano sequences. The End of the World is an all-encompassing experience: timely, intensely expressive, and incredibly expansive. For tonight's performance, Melnyk also hints that 'an operatic soprano of extraordinary quality' will be making a surprise guest appearance.

'The End of the World grew out of a moral and political conviction, that the world needs to know about the dangers to our oceans and our environment,' says Melnyk. 'This piece is a strange mixture of easy and 'difficult' piano playing – and strangely, it made my left foot grow into the floor of the stage, like a tree root: deep, unmovable. So, my left foot was always glued there by the piano on stage as I played – a lovely feeling!'

'I feel overwhelmed by the entire effect of the music, the sounds, the drama and the visual film that is being created live for people at every show,' he adds. 'The visuals on the screen are created on the spot by SPIME.IM to work together with the music and my piano, so every time, I feel this electric energy soaring through me as I play and can see the film on the screen above me. It is a great emotional experience.'

Performers

Lubomyr Melnyk piano

Julia Kent cello

Shards vocals

Elina Nechayeva soprano

Lucy Cronin, Kate Huggett, Sarah Latto, Hamish McLaren, Kieran Brunt, Oliver Martin-Smith, Simon Grant and **Augustus Perkins-Ray (Shards)** vocals

Daive Tomat, Gabriele Ottino, Marco Casolati and **Matteo Marson (SPIME.IM)** live electronics & visuals

Produced by the Barbican

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The End Of The World is co-produced by Superbudda, LEV Festival (Spain), Nextones (Italy), Snaporazverein (Switzerland), and Fondazione I Teatri Reggio Emilia / Festival Aperto (Italy) in collaboration with TOurDays and Basemental



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