

Arcadia Live

Will Gregory + Adrian Utley

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate running time: 120 minutes, no interval.

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Arwa Haider talks to Adrian Utley ahead of his orchestral, live soundtrack performance to Arcadia, alongside Will Gregory.

When BAFTA-winning director Paul Wright's film *Arcadia* was originally released in 2018, its mesmerising visuals – collated from a century of British archive doc footage – seemed to reveal a landscape that was both otherworldly and intensely close to home. *Arcadia's* celebrated original score, composed by Adrian Utley and Will Gregory, further heightened the film's folk imagery and atmospheres, with a shape-shifting sound world of yearning melodies, eerie synths and elemental rhythms. Tonight, *Arcadia* comes to fruition with a screening accompanied by a full live band soundtrack, led by Utley and Gregory, and featuring guest vocals from acclaimed contemporary folk singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Lisa Knapp.

Utley recalls how he was first struck by Wright's vision for *Arcadia*: 'I was very intrigued by the project, because it's a composite of so much archive footage,' he says. 'It really developed from Paul's ideas of 'tribal gathering', and the history of UK tradition and folk tradition.'

'One of the first things I remember was the footage of two boys, Russell and Victor, messing around on derelict wasteland (a segment taken from the 1976 doc *Best Of Friends*), which really moved me. We made this sort of glam-type track for them, because they've got big, flared trousers on, and it looked like their period in life.'

Both Utley and Gregory have earned acclaim for the range of their collaborative work previously (including an orchestral soundtrack for Carl Dreyer's 1928 movie *The Passion of Joan of Arc*), as well as their numerous respective projects, such as Portishead and Goldfrapp. For *Arcadia*, they drew on their deep-rooted creative dynamic, and also explored different directions.

'It's a very instinctive way of working with us,' says Utley. 'We both like electronics and synthesizers. We do delineate; all the orchestration was Will, and it's really beautiful. There's a tune I'd written early on the first day called *Autumn*, which goes with the destruction of the land on the film – knocking down hedgerows, building into the countryside. Will would develop that, and we'd use a string quartet.'

There is something powerfully poignant about *Arcadia's* visual and musical flow; it offers glimpses of a bucolic reverie alongside offbeat rituals; there is human folly here but also heartfelt rapport – and a kind of budding potential within its sense of a spiralling lost world. Utley remarks that its themes seem to resonate more than ever, a few years on from its release.

'The film highlights all this beautiful, and brutal, stuff,' he says. 'Since the pandemic, we've had more exodus from the city to the countryside, but within that quest for a better life, there's also the destruction of the rural idyll.'

The format of the film, and its accompanying music, also creates particular challenges for the nine-piece outfit performing live tonight, whose set will include an acid house-styled track which Utley and Gregory composed for the film (but which didn't feature on its original release). 'The

barbican

Arcadia score changes from, like, a choral piece to weirdcore, to fully electronic drums, to electric guitars to noise; it's shifting very radically, by the second,' explains Utley. 'So, every musician is playing two or three different types of instruments; everybody is incredibly brilliant. Lisa Knapp also brings that huge knowledge of the folk music world, with a forward-thinking mentality. I think she's amazing; I love the range of her voice.'

Born in south London, Knapp's upbringing involved an intersection of urban sprawl, city farm and common ground – 'I've always had that relationship with open space,' she says. The sweet tone and clarity of her own work (including 2017 collection *Till April Is Dead – A Garland for May*) reflects folk traditions but also strikes a very modern-sounding chord.

'I'm a huge admirer of Anne Briggs, who's the voice in *Arcadia's* original soundtrack; she's a massive figure in the development of my own voice and music, really,' says Knapp. 'I'm looking at a lot of English and British folk music that has a relationship to locality and geography, and I think *Arcadia* has that, as well; it's dealing with issues of tribalism, class divisions, human relationships with the natural world, agriculture, industrialisation, cities. It's that thing where what's small and close to home – the landscape that you can see from your window – is relatable for the rest of the world, as well.'

Arcadia depicts traditional expressions alongside more contemporary gatherings, such as the rave scene (which was itself closely linked to Britain's 'green belt' as well as environmental activism). Knapp notes that questions of identity, mythology and folklore seem to have resurfaced within the post-Brexit fall-out, but she adds: 'All of these things extend beyond one country. The climate catastrophe is going to affect everybody – though perhaps not everybody equally.'

Knapp enthuses about the rich territory that *Arcadia's* soundtrack covers: 'There's one point where I have to sing through this mad voice-changing synth that Will puts me through – I love that. We've got cello, viola, violins and about 100 synths! There's a bit of kick drum percussion; Adrian's got several guitars and bass guitar; there's an opera singer, Victoria Oruwari, who's fantastic.'

'Usually, when I sing live, I'd have lots of elastic space – but this is a really different experience: performing as part of an ensemble that has to have everything really tight, down to the millisecond. It's thrilling and terrifying in equal measure.'

Performers

Will Gregory lead synth, soprano saxophone

Adrian Utley electric + acoustic guitar, keys, synth, baritone guitar

Ross Hughes musical director, synth, clarinet, flute, baby bass + drums

Lisa Knapp lead vocals

Produced by the Barbican

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Arcadia (film) – produced by Hopscotch Films, supported by BFI and Creative Scotland



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