

A Winged Victory for the Sullen +London Brass, ACME strings & the voices of Shards

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate running time: 120 mins, plus 20 min interval.

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Arwa Haider talks to A Winged Victory for the Sullen's Adam Wiltzie and Dustin O'Halloran ahead of their atmospheric residency with London Brass, ACME Strings and 12-piece vocal ensemble, Shards.

'Nostalgia is probably the main inspiration behind everything we have created, for me at least...' Adam Wiltzie, one half of ambient duo A Winged Victory for the Sullen, is mulling over the force that makes their music take flight. 'It's such a hard thing to describe in words; it's just this emotion that's carried through the work, like a warm glow.'

The richly evocative instrumentals of A Winged Victory for the Sullen have been variously described as 'neo-classical', 'cinematic', and (the band's own droll suggestion) 'harmonic Robitussin'. Since the 2011 release of their self-titled debut album, their sound has seemed to flow and entwine across genres, collaborative themes, and even time zones; both Wiltzie and co-founder Dustin O'Halloran are American born but respectively based in Belgium and between Reykjavik and LA. They have composed acclaimed movie soundtracks for the French thriller *Iris* (2016) and Yorkshire-set drama *God's Own Country* (2017) and created projects alongside the dance choreographer Wayne McGregor (*Atomos*, 2014) and multimedia theatre company 59 productions (*Invisible Cities*, inspired by Italo Calvino's magic realist novel). When you experience their music live, it seems to envelope you entirely. This weekend, A Winged Victory for the Sullen make a long-awaited return, with two concerts in the Hall.

'We released *Invisible Cities* in 2021 so this is the first time these songs will be played live for an audience; this is where we will start the show, and slowly we will go through our catalogue and play music from every recording,' says Wiltzie. 'Our first record was only released 12 years ago so it is a large catalogue of music in a pretty short amount of time, and there will be different stuff on each night.'

The duo originally met in 2007, when Wiltzie (who also works with Brian McBride in Stars of the Lid) was touring with Sparklehorse in Italy (where O'Halloran, a former member of indie rock band Devics, was living at the time). 'Our work dynamic has pretty much stayed the same since then, though our friendship has grown stronger over the years,' says Wiltzie. 'It feels pretty easy; we prefer to write and record together, but we're very good at working in our own studios.'

While the gorgeously haunting *Invisible Cities* was A Winged Victory for the Sullen's latest album collection, they also released a new single, *All Our Friends Are Vampires*, in March this year. The piano and strings-drenched melody was recorded between

barbican

Wiltzie's studio in Belgium, and O'Halloran's base in Iceland, and the pair have described it as a 'melancholic instrumental Haiku for the entertainment industry', although Wiltzie's summation is more straightforward: 'The influence is... no experimental nonsense,' he smiles, wryly. 'Let's just write some really simple melodies and put them together, nothing complicated. I can't say that I haven't tried to write car chase music before – but it's not my forte.'

'We felt a thirst to return to the simplicity of where we began,' adds O'Halloran. 'To find the sound of our own miniscule nature within our universe, floating weightless in cosmic indifference; writing within the elements of piano and a vintage synth, which became the string quartet and guitar drones, and recording them all to capture time in an acoustic space.'

For these Barbican dates, A Winged Victory for the Sullen will be collaborating with London Brass and ACME Strings, as well as working for the first time with the 12-piece vocal ensemble Shards on choral arrangements.

'The live concert takes a lot of work, especially with the lighting and visuals,' says Wiltzie. 'I am not thinking about this when I am writing or recording but much later, after I have been able to digest exactly what this piece could look like in three dimensions. Now, we're able to afford to bring over the lighting designer that I use in Belgium, and we've developed a bigger sort of package, and I think, a much more satisfying show. It's a blanket you can hide behind a bit, which I like, and it just helps the audience relax. We just kind of get in our little bubble, and we ooze all of our sounds out, and hopefully, they'll have a nice time.'

A Winged Victory for the Sullen's 'little bubble' turns out to be an exceptionally spacious realm, where the direct emotional effect of their sound can take all kinds of directions, depending on the listener.

Wiltzie nods: 'It really is like having a child; you can love it as much as you want, but someday, the child has to go out into the world and figure it out for themselves – and that's kind of our metaphor for making this music.'

Performers

Adam Wiltzie vocals

Dustin O'Halloran vocals

Yuki Numata Resnick violin

Benjamin Russell violin

Clarice Jensen cello, electronics

Shida Shahabi piano, electronics

Gerda Holmquist cello

Hampus Noren keys, electronics

Shards (conducted by Kieran Brunt) vocals

London Brass:

Trombones

Richard Edwards

Byron Fulcher

David Stewart

Horns

Andrew Littlemore

Frank Walker

Produced by the Barbican



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