

SCOTTISH
CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

DIGITAL
SEASON



RISE AND FLY

29 Sept – 29 Oct 2021

Creative Learning Partner



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PROGRAMME

Season 2021/22

RISE AND FLY

Creative Learning Partner



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Kindly supported by The Gannochy Trust, Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust and The JTH Charitable Trust

29 September – 29 October 2021

Perth Concert Hall



Wolfe riSE and fLY

Rebecca Tong Conductor

Colin Currie Percussion

Rachel Leach Presenter



SCOTTISH
CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

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Our Musicians

YOUR ORCHESTRA

FIRST VIOLIN

Stephanie Gonley
Ruth Crouch
Kana Kawashima
Aisling O'Dea
Siún Milne
Amira Bedrush-McDonald

SECOND VIOLIN

Marcus Barcham Stevens
Gordon Bragg
Rachel Spencer
Niamh Lyons
Stewart Webster
Lorna McLaren

VIOLA

Felix Tanner
Liam Brolly
Steve King
Francesca Hunt

CELLO

Philip Higham
Su-a Lee
Donald Gillan
Sonia Cromarty

BASS

Ben Burnley
Adrian Bornet

FLUTE

Brontë Hudnott
Emma Roche

PICCOLO

Emma Roche

OBOE

Robin Williams
Mary James

CLARINET

Maximiliano Martín
William Stafford

BASS CLARINET

William Stafford

BASSOON

Paul Boyes
Gillian Horn

HORN

Zoë Tweed
Jamie Shield
Andrew McLean
Christine Smith

TRUMPET

Peter Franks
Shaun Harrold
Brian McGinley

TROMBONE

Duncan Wilson
Nigel Cox
Alan Adams

TUBA

Craig Anderson

PERCUSSION

Louise Goodwin
Ally Kelly
Kate Openshaw

HARP

Sharron Griffiths

PIANO

Michael Bawtree



Stephanie Gonley Director / Violin

WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

Julia Wolfe (b. 1958)

riSE and fLY (2012)

Published by G. Ricordi & Co. London Ltd

Despite winning the Pulitzer Prize (for her oratorio *Anthracite Fields* in 2015), and being a Professor of Music at New York University, Julia Wolfe is probably quite far from many people's expectations of a classical composer or academic. Perhaps it's that 'classical' adjective that's the problem: while she's written extensively for conventional classical forces, her music is often shot through, too, with the raw, visceral power of rock and pop, which she combines with the pulsing repetitions of minimalism that she picked up from Steve Reich and John Adams in an unmistakable, and very powerful, style – sometimes confrontational, always provocative, and impossible to pigeonhole.

It's an approach that's encapsulated in her percussion concerto *riSE and fLY*, written in 2012 for Edinburgh-born Colin Currie, which brings together raw power alongside modernist complexity, disco evocations, and the astonishing theatre of a percussionist performing a sweat-breaking workout all over their own body.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it was in both music and theatre that Wolfe received her undergraduate degree, and she began her career as a theatre composer. Indeed, theatre in all its forms – not least the spectacle of virtuoso performance – has informed many of her works, whatever forces they're written for. She rose to global prominence after founding new music collective Bang on a Can in 1987 with fellow composers David Lang and Michael Gordon (she had married the latter three years earlier). It quickly became one of America's most influential musical entities, and a fixture on New

© Peter Serling



Julia Wolfe

Theatre, minimalism, rock and social history: these are all elements that combine in her percussion concerto *riSE* and *fLY*. But even describing it as a 'percussion concerto' could be misleading.

York's alternative music scene, spawning its own concert series and tours, marathon concerts stretching across several hours, and its own chamber ensemble, the cheekily named Bang on a Can All-Stars.

Alongside theatre, minimalism and the raw power of rock, there's also a strong social focus in much of Wolfe's music, certainly in its subject matter. That might be age-old folk tales and traditional tunes, for example in the 17th-century murder ballad that inspired her *Cruel Sister*. Or it might reflect on more contemporary social issues: her Pulitzer Prize-winning *Anthracite Fields*, for example, examines the coal mining industry in her native Pennsylvania.

Theatre, minimalism, rock and social history: these are all elements that combine in her percussion concerto *riSE* and *fLY*. But even describing it as a

'percussion concerto' could be misleading: the soloist plays no conventional percussion instruments at all, but instead aims their beaters and mallets (or, more strictly speaking, their palms and fingers) at their own body – their chest, lap, hands and feet – before turning to a ramshackle collection of discarded trash that might be picked up on the streets. Wolfe explains that the piece is inspired by 'New York City street beats and the rhythm of American work song', moving from 'the American tradition of body percussion to the contemporary urban 'folk' rhythms of the street'. She was inspired, she says, by her home city of New York's 'amazing array of live street musicians gracing subway platforms and street corners – accordion players, singers, Chinese erhus, and more. But perhaps the most amazing music comes from the street drummers. Banging out grooves on plastic tubs and pots and pans, they speak the rhythm of



Colin Currie

the city. They make me smile and I am one of their most attentive listeners.' While there's no specific story behind the music, it nonetheless traces a development from older, more rural music (indeed, its title comes from a chain gang work song collected by the great US folksong researcher Alan Lomax) to newer, grittier urban beats.

riSE and fLY unfolds in a series of waves, each based around minimalist-style repetitions that grow bigger, denser and more intense before suddenly breaking to give way to the wave following behind. With their humming and breathing, even the Orchestra's players seem to be emulating the body music of the soloist's rubbing hands, chest slaps and foot stomps at the piece's gentle opening, though flashing flurries of notes gradually build to something more substantial, complete with foghorn blasts

from the orchestral horns. The next wave kicks off with swelling Adams-style patterns on the violins, later replaced by an implacable beat in the violas and cellos that serves as the backdrop to gritty, bluesy material from the brass and woodwind – all of which suddenly breaks off for the soloist's virtuosic workout of a cadenza, tapped and slapped out across their body in catchy rhythms. It marks the piece's turning point, and the appearance of the 'street' percussion, accompanied by a quick pulsing pattern that begins in the violas and cellos and builds to sound like the workings of a gargantuan machine, before the work's disco-flavoured final wave (just listen out its off-kilter bassline and distinctive slide high in the violins) pushes the piece ever harder towards its joyfully raucous conclusion.

© David Kettle



Rebecca Tong



Rachel Leach

5 KEY FACTS FROM OUR PROGRAMME

- 1** New York-based composer Julia Wolfe blends the hypnotic minimalism of Philip Glass and Steve Reich with the visceral power of rock in many of her works.
- 2** The soloist in her percussion concerto *riSE and fLY* plays no traditional instruments at all: instead, they use their own body, and a collection of trash that they might pick up on the street.
- 3** *riSE and fLY*, Wolfe says, is inspired by the American tradition of body percussion and the amazing street drummers she listens to in New York.
- 4** Wolfe gets her orchestral musicians playing unconventionally, too, with humming and breathing before they begin on their instruments.
- 5** *riSE and fLY* takes a swerve into disco for its raucous conclusion, with a catchy bassline and sliding violins.

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