

1 Ensemble Musikfabrik: Saunders 1

Huddersfield Town Hall, 7pm

Tickets £25 (£19 concession / online)

Ensemble Musikfabrik:

Helen Bledsoe flute
Peter Veale oboe
Carl Rosman clarinet
James Aylward bassoon
Christine Chapman horn
Marco Blaauw trumpet
Matthew Conley trumpet
Bruce Collings trombone
Melvyn Poore tuba
Ulrich Löffler piano
Benjamin Kobler piano
Dirk Rothbrust percussion
Thomas Meixner percussion
Krassimir Sterev accordion
Hannah Weirich violin
Yoonhee Lee violin
Axel Porath violin
Dirk Wietheger violoncello
Florentin Ginot double bass

Enno Poppe conductor
Juliet Fraser soprano
Paul Jeukendrup sound design
Rebecca Saunders concept / spatial direction

The pioneering Ensemble Musikfabrik present *Yes*, a new work by renowned composer Rebecca Saunders, the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Huddersfield in November 2018. A meditation in the ambiguities of language and expression, *Yes* is inspired by the time-warping monologue that concludes James Joyce's masterpiece *Ulysses*. It is a literally breathtaking piece of music, the ensemble responding to the inhales and exhales in Fraser's vocal performance with fluid arrangements. The result is an ever-changing collage of music and theatre in which our preconceived notions of language are lost to time.

Rebecca Saunders (UK, 1967) Yes **UK PREMIERE**
 (2016/17) 80'

Yes refers to Molly Bloom's monologue, the final chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. This monologue can be regarded as a kind of literary collage, a web woven from the innumerable paths traced by stories, thoughts, associations, and moments in a continuous, unrelenting high-energy stream: a snapshot, a state of being before and during the act of falling asleep, amid glimmerings of the subconscious.

Oscillating between moments of absence and presence, the text is not always audible, remaining often subcutaneous, yet still tangible and present. The monologue is often sung, but also recited by the soprano and the instrumental musicians, be it on an out- or in- breath, half-whispered, nearly silent, or suppressed beneath a hand. At times words or phrases rear up, becoming visible, audible and intelligible, before disappearing again, consumed within the flow of the music – just as moments of Bloom's biography, personality, and memories take on temporary form in her inner, stream-of-consciousness monologue, only to sink back into the river of time.

Working with the voice, its limits, and the need of breath can capture an innate human fallibility, a raw intimacy – and exploring a multitude of ways to work with the breath opened up a whole new world of sonic and emotional possibilities. The various forms of recitation of the text seeks partly to suppress and transform the monologue into a multitude of a sonic surfaces, which the music then implies, suggests, frames and re-contextualises. While *Yes* eschews any immediacy of meaning, its juxtaposition of words and music seeks to unleash meaningful, emotionally charged relationships from within the text.

The repeated 'yes' is ambiguous and complex. It casts shadows of and allusions to: the moment of half-conscious orgasm; a life-affirming 'yes'; the 'yes' that seals one's fate; and Bloom's recollections of myriad sexual encounters. These



Rebecca Saunders © Astrid Ackermann

deeply erotic moments – in all their facets, from romantic to soberingly grotesque – appear in the music in a variety of shadings, which overlap and coalesce. *Yes* closely explores the monologue's most explicit passages – specifically intending to rebuke any coy, clichéd interpretation of Molly Bloom – plumbing the fathomless depths of Joyce's text, with its unleashing of a raw sexual energy that refuses narrow definitions of sex and gender.

A singer stands silently on the stage – a theatrical moment in itself. The human body – our anticipation of it, of every movement of the eyes, the corners of the mouth – therein lies infinite dramatic potential. In *Yes*, both soprano and instrumentalists are viewed as protagonists in a quasi-abstract theatre, co-existing in a shared sonic landscape. The 28 separately composed soli, chamber-music works, and ensemble pieces – the modules – are distributed throughout the space, and are collaged in a spatial and musical polyphony.

Almost every module represents, with exhaustive insistence, an immutable state, always in essence the same. Fragments, each time slightly varied,

gradually create a single image or 'object': imprints reiterated and projected into time and space, like a giant mobile seen from many perspectives, that in itself remains untouched. The light, the focus, and the position from which it is perceived are altered, as is our nearness and distance to the object – a manifest complex protraction of the one, singular thing.

Yes explores a music which steps out of the flow of time, which is projected into space like a sound sculpture – and which, at the moment of listening, seeks absolute focus on the physical presence of the sound.

© Rebecca Saunders (from an interview with Barbara Barthelmes of the Berlin Festspiele, 2017)

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This concert will be broadcast by BBC Radio 3 on Saturday 15 December 2018