

SATURDAY 19 AUGUST

GBSR DUO

OLIVER
LEITH
&
GALINA
USTVOLSKAYA

SATURDAY 19 AUGUST at 7.30PM

GBSR Duo

George Barton & Siwan Rhys



Oliver Leith

***good day good day bad day bad day* (2018)
for keyboards and percussion**

Galina Ustvolskaya

**Composition № 2 *Dies irae* (1973)
for eight double basses, piano
and wooden cube**

Scott Walker: *and who shall go to the ball? and what shall go to the ball?* Part 1

Earth: Teeth Of Lions Rule The Divine

sunn O))) : Aurora

Boris: Introduction

GBSR Duo

George Barton — percussion

Siwan Rhys — piano and keyboard

Double basses

Marianne Schofield (principal)

Lucía Polo Moreno

Toby Hughes

Sam Becker

Ben Griffiths

Ben Havinden-Williams

Phoebe Clarke

Thea Sayer

Cover image with many thanks to **Martin Parr**

'After a few weeks living here, I put out a few teddy bears and he came home one day and just went mad about it'

England, 1991.

From *Signs of the Times*

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BOLD TENDENCIES

“New music does not get more lovable than *good day good day bad day bad day*. It’s a piece you want to hug. A sweet-hearted hypnagogic gem from one of the young masters of the sadboi school.”

—Igor Toronyi-Lalic

“In the thwack of the *Dies irae* or the onslaught of the Sixth Piano Sonata, we don't just get an account of the fear and isolation of Soviet life under Stalinism and the decades that followed. We begin to feel that fear and isolation ourselves – I mean feel it physically in the clenching of muscles and quickening of breath and doom-knot that takes hold in the stomach.”

—Kate Molleson

GBSR's return to Bold Tendencies following their presentation of Stockhausen KONTAKTE and Aphex Twin *Computer Controlled Acoustic Instruments pt.2* last summer offers another opportunity to consider an unusual pairing of works.

Tonight's musical pieces both tackle ideas of crisis: personal, mental and spiritual; but the nature of the responses could hardly be more different. Oliver Leith's soft-edged sadboi music evokes the strange comforts of personal rituals, cloistered domesticity, and codependent relationships as an evasion mechanism in the face of anxiety and mental illness; Galina Ustvolskaya's bald, unadorned, brutal and uncompromising music is the sound of a soul mercilessly facing up to spiritual crisis.

Oliver Leith calls *good day good day bad day bad day* “a tender look at the simultaneously debilitating and beautiful irrationalities of our everyday lives – how our obsessions

and our compulsions surface, and the rituals, superstitions and routines we all play out to appease our minds.” The piece explicitly takes inspiration from two sources: the experience of some of Leith's friends who experience or have experienced obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD); and George and Siwan's small Homerton flat at the time of the piece's composition, stuffed with percussion and keyboard instruments, with no delineation between rehearsal and living space. Ritual and haziness are fundamental principles of the music: material is introduced and obsessively worked out, 'perfected', into banality or non-existence; boundaries are blurred as the piece explores liminal areas between instruments and non-instruments, in- and out- of tune, pitched and unpitched, audible and inaudible.

Blurriest of all is the work's relationship to the reality of its performers. Suggesting a connection between the obsessive practice of the musician, the suffering of Leith's friends with mental illness and the OCD from which George also suffered as a teenager, the work presents its two players as sensitive, vulnerable individuals. As they indulge in eight private rituals over the course of its eight movements, the boundaries blur between theatrical presentation and domestic reality, almost as the boundaries of the believable are blurred in the mind of the OCD-sufferer.

The overall effect is a tender, poetic, simultaneously comforting and uncomfortable evocation of the feeling of taking refuge in the familiar against the backdrop of a suggested but unfronted fear.

Evasion, appeasement, refuge: these are not words to associate with either the music or the person of Galina Ustvolskaya. Preferring to compose with the blinds lowered, Ustvolskaya unapologetically acknowledged and explored the darkness in her own nature and in the world she experienced. Anecdotes abound of her random acts of gleeful malice; meanwhile her work - only 21 acknowledged compositions - is characterised by brutal blocks of sound, unremitting repetition and extreme dynamics.

Dies irae is the central work in a trilogy of pieces written consecutively between 1971-75 with the title *Композиция, compositsiya*. This is not the Russian word for a musical composition (which is *сочинение, sochinenie*), but rather more an equivalent for the English word as it is used to refer to the composition of a painting – i.e. it specifically refers to a work's formal qualities and the method of its construction. The use of this title is a paradox, as is the fact that all three are for instrumental chamber groups with no voices (as opposed to Ustvolskaya's symphonies, all of which unusually incorporate spoken or sung text), given that each of the *композиции* are given evocative titles from the Latin liturgy (the other two being *Dona nobis pacem* and *Benedictus qui venit*).

The familiar *Dies irae* plainchant does not appear, nor is there any clear correspondence to be found between the nineteen verses of the Latin sequence and Ustvolskaya's ten marked sections (varying between around forty seconds and five minutes). Instead the connection is enigmatic and spiritual – a sublimation of the ideas of the *Dies irae* sequence into pure sonic brutality of judgement and wrath, a scream of black rage and fear.

Ustvolskaya disapproved of analysis of her music, warning “It is better not to write anything at all about my music than constantly to write the same thing over and over in a circle”. But at the risk of falling into the same trap that Ustvolskaya accused composer and pianist Frank Denyer of falling into (“You quote my words that I ask not to analyse my music but you yourself begin... with an analysis, and the analysis is very standard and ordinary”), perhaps we should recall the labelling of this piece as a *kompositsiya* not a *sochinenie* for a clue as to why. *Dies irae* is not intended to be the piece's programme: the work is not attempting to depict, but rather to instantiate; its 'composition' of musical materials takes place within the context of darkness as lived experience.

Tonight the concrete spaces at Bold Tendencies are exploited as simultaneously blank, uncompromising and potentially sinister. The raw, tough environment is at once perfectly suited to the addictive tones of Oliver Leith and the cruel, merciless sonic world of Galina Ustvolskaya. In *good day good day bad day bad day* the evocation of domesticity in an otherwise industrial surrounding might suggest the opposition of negative threatening space surrounding the domestic sanctum; meanwhile in Composition № 2 *Dies irae* the lack of architectural adornment and the space's thrillingly direct acoustic allow the music and its spiritual struggle to be experienced with a greater feeling of intimacy - as drama without theatricality; or perhaps even suffering with structure.

Oliver Leith (b.1990) is London-based composer and artist. He writes music that is “deadpan, subversive, quietly anarchic, disarmingly heart-sore and sweet-sour” (BBC Radio 3, Kate Molleson). His pieces have been played by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, members of the Philharmonia Orchestra, Apartment House, Royal Northern Sinfonia, London Sinfonietta, Trio Catch and Explore Ensemble, and heard at the BBC Proms, Southbank Centre, Wigmore Hall, Aix Festival, and Liszt Academy (Budapest).

His acclaimed debut chamber opera *Last Days*, with a text by Matt Copson, premiered at the Royal Opera House’s Linbury Theatre in 2022, with Jack Sheen conducting 12 Ensemble and the GBSR Duo. Based on Gus Van Sant’s 2005 film, it starred Agathe Rousselle and featured costumes by Balenciaga.

In 2022 Manchester Collective premiered Leith’s *will o wisp*, co-commissioned with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra. Forthcoming projects include works for EXAUDI and the Hallé with Thomas Adès. Other large-scale pieces include *Taxa* (2013, conducted by Ilan Volkov) and *Dream Horse* for soprano, bass, and chamber orchestra (a commission from the 2018 Tanglewood Festival). His music has been released on Another Timbre and Pentatone; accolades include a 2016 British Composer Award for saxophone quartet *A Day at The Spa* and the 2014 RPS Composer Prize.

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Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2002) studied at the Music College of her native Petrograd (St. Petersburg) from 1937 to 1939 and at the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory there

until 1947. Here she completed her post-graduate studies and eventually led a composition class at the conservatory's affiliated music college. Her composition teacher Dmitri Shostakovich expressed his enthusiasm for her music. Several times he stood up for her in the Composers' Association against the resistance of his colleagues.

Along with Sofia Gubaidulina, Ustvolskaya is considered Russia's most important contemporary woman composer. Her catalogue of works is extremely concentrated, conveying a succinct and uncompromising musical message. Ustvolskaya's compositions are meant to be "symphonic", regardless of their actual instrumentation or temporal extent. She writes ascetic music supported by remarkable rhythmic power. Bar lines are often missing from the notation, which produces astonishingly asymmetrical polyphonic constructions. Dynamic developments are reduced almost to pure terraced dynamics and are characterised by extreme contrasts. The mainly Christian texts she sets are aphoristic and concentrated. Her works speak of an austere, independent spirit, of relentless will and deep faith.

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GBSR Duo (George Barton and Siwan Rhys) combines two of the UK's finest young contemporary chamber musicians. The duo has built its reputation on a combination of exceptional interpretations of the existing piano-percussion repertoire, committed performances of ambitious new commissions, and inventive collaborations.

BOLD TENDENCIES

Known for their fearless, intense performances, GBSR's work ranges from the twentieth-century modernism of Stockhausen and Birtwistle to music by Brian Eno and Aphex Twin. They have a special interest in the exquisite delicacy of composers like Morton Feldman, Eva-Maria Houben and Barbara Monk Feldman, whose work they have championed, and maintain close continuing relationships with composers like Oliver Leith, CHAINES and Angharad Davies, who share their appetite for musical cross-fertilisation.

Recent performances include Barbara Monk Feldman at Spitalfields Music Festival and Kettle's Yard, Stockhausen and Aphex Twin at Bold Tendencies, Eva-Maria Houben at hcmf// and the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Laurence Osborn and Harold Budd/Brian Eno at Cheltenham Festival, Norfolk and Norwich Festival and Kings Place, and Oliver Leith's opera *Last Days* at the Royal Opera House Linbury Theatre.

Their critically-acclaimed recordings include Stockhausen KONTAKTE (Album of the Week, The Guardian, "a landmark performance" - Tom Service, BBC Radio 3) and Oliver Leith's *good day good day bad day bad day* (Pick of the Week, The Guardian, a Highlight of 2020, Radio 3 New Music Show). Forthcoming performances include Theatr Mwldan, Aberteifi in September for Radio 3, Kings Place in December performing late Stockhausen keyboard works, and Walt Disney Hall in February, joining the LA Philharmonic for the US premiere of Oliver Leith *Last Days*.

Final Live Events of the Season

Thursday 24 & Friday 25 August at 7pm

The Multi-Story Orchestra: Into the Deep

Friday 1 September at 7.30pm

Jay Bernard: The Last Seven Years

Saturday 2 September at 7.30pm

Philip Glass: The Complete Piano Etudes

Maki Namekawa & James McVinnie

Thursday 7 September at 7.30pm

Jeneba Kanneh-Mason

Music by Shostakovich, Beethoven, Franz Liszt, Florence Price

Friday 8 September at 7.30pm

Isata Kanneh-Mason

Music by Haydn, Fanny Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin

Sunday 10 September at 6pm

Derek Jarman: Modern Nature

Wednesday 13 September at 7.30pm

The Bittersweet Review

Amelia Abraham, Jordan/Martin Hell, Donna Marcus Duke

Saturday 16 September at 7.30pm

Gustav Mahler: Symphony No. 1 "Titan"

Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Elena Schwarz

Upcoming Free Creative Learning Sessions

Made possible by the generous support of the Mila Trust.

Friday 7 September at 1pm

Backstage Pass: Jeneba Kanneh-Mason

Delve into the worlds of Dmitri Shostakovich, Beethoven, Franz Liszt and Florence Price through the magical work of pianist Jeneba Kanneh-Mason. Following a short performance, there will be a Q&A offering an opportunity to gain insight into Jeneba's journey, ideas and career as a professional musician.

Saturday 8 September at 1pm

Backstage Pass: Isata Kanneh-Mason

Award-winning pianist Isata Kanneh-Mason will animate the lower levels through a special performance for local school groups. This session will be followed by a facilitated Q&A, offering insight into her world-renowned practice and the music she plays.

Saturday 16 September at 1pm

Backstage Pass: Philharmonia Orchestra

An interactive workshop led by Philharmonia's musicians and Teddy Prout, the Orchestra's Learning & Participation Manager. This session will deep dive into Mahler's First Symphony through participatory activities, actions and performances. This session is aimed at senior groups based in Southwark.

Saturday 16 September at 3pm

Public Rehearsal: Gustav Mahler: Symphony No.1

An informal and relaxed opportunity to hear live the emotionally powerful work of Gustav Mahler, performed by the vast forces of the Philharmonia Orchestra. This session is open to anyone who faces barriers to attending the evening performance and/or is curious to see, hear and experience an orchestra in action, at work.

We need your help!

Every year we fundraise to keep our programme thriving and to keep tickets affordable. This means ticket sales only cover about 5% of our costs. Every donation, however big or small, has a major impact and helps us to do more and better. Donations can be made on-site and on-line on our website.

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