

Explore Ensemble x Klaus Lang

ft. EXAUDI

Saturday 1st July 2023 | All Hallows-by-the-Tower

Lara Agar *Ham* (10')

Catherine Lamb *color residua* (10')*

(world premiere)

Interval (15')

Klaus Lang *march (william morris)* (60')**

(world premiere)

*with EXAUDI

**with Klaus Lang, organ

Explore Ensemble:

Taylor MacLennan flute

Alex Roberts clarinet

Joseph Havlat piano

Nicholas Moroz guitar

David Lopez Ibanez violin

Julia Doukakis viola

Emma Purslow viola

Deni Teo cello

Toby Hughes double bass

EXAUDI:

Juliet Fraser soprano

Cathy Bell mezzo

Michael Hickman baritone

Klaus Lang organ

This evening's concert presents three pieces connected by contrasting views of sound in space, with each of the three pieces using the church space and its acoustic in a unique way.

Lara Agar's *Ham* points to outer space itself, and is her homage to the first great ape in space, named after the Holloman Aeromedical Laboratory, and sent on a successful return trip by NASA in January 1961. Composed in 2021 for the Festival of Laurence Crane in honour of his 60th birthday, Agar surrounds the audience with a motley ensemble of piano, sampler, organ, guitar and cello. They perform material independent of one another, forming a patchwork of drifting, spacey material, at times perhaps hinting at sci-fi motifs, or at least moments of altered or vast perspectives. Someway through this short piece, the musicians erupt in rabbled song, with the words from one of the scientists at the time: "he had a smile on his face -- but," said the experts, "that's a sign of great distress, that's a sign of great distress". As Agar explains:

"While singing, the players act as the scientists, onlookers and astronauts expectantly waiting, fussing over and wondering about the journey of the space monkey."

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Catherine Lamb's *color residua*, scored for three voices and four strings, offers a rich yet hushed tapestry hewn from a slow motion melody shared between the ensemble. Lamb is one of today's preeminent composers working in just intonation, where harmony is based on natural harmonics rather than equal temperament, and creates an abundance of tone colours, from completely pure or smooth intervals, to moments where sound seems to animate the space with minute beatings between microtonal intervals.

In her own words:

"The piece consists of four small 'residuals' or 'after-image studies', where three fused voices produce lingering shadows carried over by four string instrumentalists.

I explore the voice as formant generator, by sounding gradual mutations between distinct vowel shapes—blurring the psychoacoustic clarities with dissolving, lingering residues via added instruments. To me, the voice has such a phenomenal potential as an instrument because of its ability to blend and to emphasise particular spectra so precisely, as well as being naturally devoid of temperament and reference.

The immediacy of the voice being sounded by the human being is also interesting to me, how it resonates so clearly in the body and alongside another. The waves immediately coalesce. It is a piece where I begin to navigate the edges between what would be distinguished as melody and harmony. (The

two becoming the same or becoming blurred together)."

Klaus Lang's new work *march (william morris)* lasts around an hour, and is structured as a palindrome:

A - Praeludium

B - Stanza I

C - Intermezzo I

B - Stanza II

C - Intermezzo II

B - Stanza III

A - Postludium

The outer sections present lively spiralling material of fast piano arpeggi, pulsing strings, and woodwind filigree, standing in stark contrast to the slower interior of the work. The three stanzas offer glacial chorales that tend to dissolve through time, underpinned by rumbling tremolo in the piano. The intermezzo's present even sparser music, though still pristine; a landscape solely occupied by solo piano as it tolls and chimes alone as if becoming lost in the distance.

Lang looked to the past of Explore Ensemble's native country for inspiration, and specifically, nineteenth century British artists responding to the thralls of the industrial revolution. His new work for organ and sextet expresses a refutation for today's digital revolution and consumerist society, in search of a more life-affirming and humane art as the everyday experience of beauty and fulfilment. Each stanza set the poem 'march' by William Morris:

Slayer of the winter, art thou here again?
O welcome, thou that's bring'st the summer
nigh!
The bitter wind makes not thy victory vain,
Nor will we mock thee for thy faint blue sky.
Welcome, O March! whose kindly days and dry
Make April ready for the throstle's song,
Thou first redresser of the winter's wrong!

Yea, welcome March! and though I die ere June,
Yet for the hope of life I give thee praise,
Striving to swell the burden of the tune
That even now I hear thy brown birds raise,
Unmindful of the past or coming days;
Who sing: 'Oh joy! a new year is begun:
What happiness to look upon the sun!'

Ah, what begetteth all this storm of bliss
But death himself, who crying solemnly,
E'en from the heart of sweet Forgetfulness,
Bids us 'Rejoice, lest pleasureless ye die,
Within a little time must ye go by.
Stretch forth your open hands, and while ye live
Take all the gifts that Death and Life may give.'

Written in parallel to the new work, his essay
'The Return of Craft', gives insight into Lang's
perspective, excerpts:

"We are flooded by digital and real trash and
by cheaply produced industrial products made
of plastic. We observe the deterioration of
cultural techniques and skills such as listening,
concentration over longer periods of time. The

goal of the digital mechanisms and algorithms that
dominate our lives is the absolute distraction and
dissolution of ourselves: we lose our centre. In this
way, the term "person" regains its original meaning:
people become the wearers of predefined masks.

On the other hand, one can also see movements
opposing this development described above: In the
shadow of the total digitalisation/industrialisation of
our lives, alternative models of life are also growing.
A core idea of this movement is a new culture of
craftsmanship: we see the rise of 'craft beer' and
'urban gardening', the emergence of repair coffees
and the renaissance of handicrafts like knitting and
bread baking, the emergence of new crafts like 'craft
programming'.

If we look at history, there seems to be an interesting
parallel between the industrial revolution of the 19th
century and the digital revolution of our time: the
emergence of the arts and crafts movement as a
counterweight to industrialisation.

The creation of a just society, the preservation of the
natural world and the creation of beauty; for Morris,
all three are interdependent and inseparable. Craft
was Morris' way to restore and secure the dignity of
every human being. Through craftsmanship, life is
determined in the sense that it is given direction
through meaningful and fulfilling work. Musical craft
requires this ability to think in sound and time and
not in terms.

For me, art is like a journey to a land of beauty from
which one returns as another person with new
insights. Art makes our lives more beautiful and
richer by enabling us to have deep inner experiences
and experiences outside our everyday existence.

We experience that insight is something much more deeply fulfilling than consumption. It shows that this is possible without the ultimately destructive pursuit of profit and material utility. The prerequisites for experiencing art, namely leisure and the need for insight, must be protected and preserved as essential components of human life, because the preservation of our humanity is also the preservation of our world.

Art makes our lives more beautiful. To decorate something also means to give it value, to appreciate it and to love it. Love of beauty is also an expression of love of life, it is an affirmation of life and stands in contrast to a puritan ethic whose gaze is always fixed on purpose, utility, economy and ultimately death and the life believed to follow it.”

*Programme notes by Nicholas Moroz,
Artistic Director of Explore Ensemble*

Explore Ensemble

Described as one of the UK's 'top new music bands' (Kate Molleson, BBC Radio 3), Explore Ensemble is a chamber group in London that performs, commissions, and promotes new music.

Built around a core sextet which often works with electronics, Explore Ensemble's reputation for outstanding performances and inventive curation stems from its advocacy of some of the most original composers of today, combined with its revival of landmark works from the recent past.

Since its founding in 2012 at the Royal College of Music, the ensemble has been featured on BBC Radio 3's New Music Show and at festivals and venues throughout the UK and beyond.

In 2021, Explore Ensemble was awarded the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung Ensemble Prize to support its artistic and organisational development.

Klaus Lang's new work is commissioned by Explore Ensemble with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung. Explore Ensemble's 2023 season is made possible with the support of the Hinrichsen Foundation.

Read more at [explore-ensemble.com](https://www.explore-ensemble.com)

EXAUDI

EXAUDI is one of the world's leading vocal ensembles for new music. Founded by James Weeks (director) and Juliet Fraser (soprano) in 2002, EXAUDI is based in London and draws its singers from among the UK's brightest vocal talents.

EXAUDI's special affinity is for the radical edges of contemporary music, at home equally with complexity, microtonality and experimental aesthetics. The newest new music is at the heart of its repertoire, and it has given national and world premieres of many of today's leading composers, from Sciarrino and Ferneyhough to Cassandra Miller and Jürg Frey, among many others.

EXAUDI is also strongly involved with the emerging generation of young composers, and regularly takes part in composer development schemes and residences such as Voix Nouvelles Royaumont and IRCAM Manifeste Academie, as well as workshops at UK universities and conservatoires.

Read more at [exaudi.org.uk](https://www.exaudi.org.uk)

Klaus Lang

Klaus Lang lives in Steirisch Lassnitz, Austria. He studied composition, music theory, and organ. Klaus loves tea and dislikes lawnmowers and Richard Wagner. His music is not used to communicate non-musical content, but is rather seen as a free and self-standing acoustical object. In his work, sound is given the opportunity to unfold its inherent rich beauties—to be perceived as what it really is: a temporal phenomenon, or audible time. Klaus sees time as the genuine material of a composer and at the same time also the fundamental content of music. In his view, musical material is time perceived through sound, and the object of music is the experience of time through listening. Music is time made audible.

Read more at klang.mur.at

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