

TELL

Mimi Doulton & Ben Smith

Tuesday 4th July 2023 | St John's Hoxton

Michael Finnissy *Edda* (7')

(UK premiere)

Rasmus Zwicki *TELL* (20')

(UK premiere)*

Michael Finnissy *Andersen-Liederkreis* (40')

**Co-commissioned by Spitalfields Music, Koda Culture
and the States Kunstfond*

Mimi Doulton soprano

Ben Smith piano

Tonight's performance is being recorded by
BBC Radio 3 for a future broadcast as part of the
New Music Show.

This concert is dedicated to the memory of

Kenneth Blakeley, a long-time friend to
Spitalfields Music and a lover of music.

To call TELL a programme about storytelling is slightly misleading; all music tells some kind of story, whether it has words or not. What this programme sets out to explore is what connects us between cultures and between times: the ancient Gods, oral histories, folk tales, and fantasies that have been passed across generations and across borders throughout history.

I was drawn to Finnissy's *Andersen-Liederkreis* for precisely this reason. It takes classic tales that we know and love, such as the *Emperor's New Clothes*, and sets them in contemporary musical language that is—at times—imbued with nostalgia and whimsy. The old stories are clothed in modernity, but the sounds of modernity pay due homage to the masters of the past.

Finnissy takes us across yet another divide by setting Andersen not only in the original Danish, but also in German and English translation. Every word we hear in a 'foreign' language is also sung in English. It is an interesting way to approach the question of how we connect audiences to text in other languages, and was an idea I challenged Rasmus Zwicki to explore further in his new work, *TELL*.


Thank you for joining us to share in these old words, old worlds, and new sounds. We look forward to hearing what you find in them.

– Mimi Doulton

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Michael Finnissy *Edda*

The text for this work is inspired by the *Poetic Edda* – an untitled collection of Old Norse anonymous narrative poems. The poem is mysterious, at times sinister, invoking ancient Gods Thor, Freya and Odin with flashes of colour and drama. *Edda* was composed for Ben and I in late 2022, and premiered at Ny Musik I Birkerød in April 2023.

– Mimi Doulton

Song Text

Ask him - ask him again -
ask this -
sitting alone - such anger -
maybe heart's sorrow -
tell me.

Is he already dead?
Tell me if he is already dead
cursed - one day - all my days -
I hear -
before - and - what is that?
someone else there - afraid.

Can you see - in my hand?
does any desire occur?
in my hand
never see -
my desires.

Thor is angry - listen you giants -
Freyr is angry - listen twisted gold and swan's feathers -
Odin is angry - listen.
A step - further forward -
his son - desire - after nine nights -
love-pleasure - one night long - two nights - three?

Text adapted by Michael Finnissy from the poetic Edda

Rasmus Zwicki *TELL*

TELL is a song cycle unfolding in the communicative overlap of music and language; an inextinguishable longing through all parts of life to tell and be told. It was inspired by talks with my ear training teacher and friend, Amanda Skouboe Brandenhoff, and by her beautiful journey from musician to storyteller.

– Rasmus Zwicki

Song Text

I
Tell

Civil twilight:

Center of the sun zero to six degrees below the horizon
Outdoor activities without artificial light.

Borgerligt tuskørke:

*Solens centrum nul til seks grader under horisonten.
Udendørs aktiviteter uden kunstigt lys.*

II
Tell me

Nautical twilight:

Center of the sun six to twelve degrees below the horizon. Reliable sightings of well-known stars.

Nautisk tuskørke:

*Solens centrum seks til tolv grader under horisonten.
Pålidelige observationer af kendte stjerner.*

III
Tell me

Astronomical twilight:

Center of the sun twelve to eighteen degrees below the horizon. Sunlight reflected on the night sky.

Astronomisk tussmørke:

Solens centrum tolv til atten grader under horisonten.

Genskær af solens lys på nattehimlen.

IV

Tell me a bedtime story

Civil dusk

Center of the sun six degrees below the horizon.

The sky has many colours such as orange and red.

Borgerlig skumring:

Solens centrum seks grader under horisonten.

Himlen har mange farver, som orange og rød.

V

Tell me the story of the girl and her grandmother

Tell me the forest lake

Sunshine glistening in the water

Tell me the grandmother's blue shawl

Folded on the shore

The girls who stays behind waiting for her grandmother

Tell me, grandmother

She walks along the lake

Sunshine glistening

Takes off her clothes

She feels different in the water

The forest lake makes her young again

Her skin so fine

Her hair so dark, glistening

She's a young woman now

Her eyes glistening

She sees the tiniest things, hears the finest sounds

Tell me, her joy

Grandmother goes back to the girl as a young woman.

Tell me, the girl who feels so scared

Young woman tells the girl 'I'm your grandmother'

The girl she does not know, crying 'you're not my grandmother'

Young woman sighing

'Stay on your grandmother's blue shawl, don't cry!

I will go find her now'.

Nautical dusk:

Center of the sun twelve degrees below the horizon.

Stars and planets easily seen with naked eyes.

Nautisk skumring:

Solens centrum tolv grader under horisonten.

Stjerner og planeter ses tydeligt med blotte øjne.

VI

I no longer hear your story

Jeg hører ikke

Astronomical dusk:

Center of the sun eighteen degrees below the horizon.

Sun no longer illuminates the sky.

Astronomisk skumring:

Solens centrum atten grader under horisonten.

Solen oplyser ikke længere himlen.

VII

Astronomical dawn:

Center of the sun eighteen degrees below the horizon.

Fainter stars begin to disappear.

Astronomisk daggry:

Solens centrum atten grader under horisonten.

Svage stjerner begynder at forsvinde.

VIII

Sunshine glistening in the water

Solen glinser i vandet

Nautical dawn:

Center of the sun twelve degrees below the horizon.

Enough light to clearly distinguish sky from water.

Nautisk daggry:

Solens centrum tolv grader under horisonten.

Lys nok til at skelne himlen fra havet.

IX

Tell me

Civil dawn:

Center of the sun six degrees below the horizon.

There may be bronze, orange and yellow
colours in the sky.

Borgerligt daggry:

Solens centrum seks grader under horisonten.

Bronze, orange og gule farver kan forekomme på himlen.

*Text adapted by Rasmus Zwicky from conversations with
Amanda Skouboe Brandenhoff*

Michael Finnissy Andersen Liederkreis

Several summers ago I visited Andersen's house. Like most people, I knew some of his fables and tales, but I did not know his poems, travelogues, and surreal paper cut-outs. When Juliet Fraser and Mark Knoop asked if I would write them an extended song cycle, I decided to reclaim this unfairly neglected work. The dominant themes in Andersen Liederkreis are song, clothes and appearances, and death.

– Michael Finnissy

With thanks to the Marchus Trust and Vaughan Williams Foundation for their support.

I The Bird Incarnating Song

II Hjertets Melodier - Melodies of the Heart

III For the album of Madame Grove, nee Fenger

IV Spørg Amagermo'er 1871 - Ask Old Mother Tot!

V Hjertesuk af en udtjent Damekjole / Heartfelt sighs
from thrown-out ladies' clothing

VI Martsviolerne - Maerzveilchen - March-violets

VII Tyveknaegten - Muttertraum - A mother's dream

VIII Soldaten - The soldier

IX Keiserens nye Klaeder - The emperor's new clothes

X Rosenknoppen 1836 - The rose-bud

XI Recension 1830 - Critique

XII Da jeg saa hende igjen 1844 - When I saw you again

Song Text

I

Det er Vintertid

Jorden har et Sneelag,

Luften er høi og klar,

Træerne staae som hvide Koraller.

Deilige er Naten.

The winter air is bright and cold

A sharp wind scattering the snow.

Trees stand out like white coral against the night sky.

By the open sea: a giant's grace, and seated on the tomb the
spirit of the buried hero.

'Noone sings the deeds of my life. Are they forgotten?

Deeds of strength. Of youthful courage. Of valour and fearless
adventure'.

Da greb den gamle Barde I Harpens Strænge.

Nearby a tiny bird had heard these words

And as the unquiet spirit rose up and vanished

The tiny bird began to sing:

Døden er ikke livet vælder.

Then the bird soared away over mountaintop and valley,
Over fields and vast oceans.
It sang not only in praise of heroes,
but of the land of its birth.
Runes and old wives tales
And songs of love, so many and so warm,
Of fidelity and truth.

Throughout time as tales were told, there hovered nearby
this tiny bird
And now perchance he looks in on us: waiting to sing
While everything on earth is hidden away.

II

*Min tankes tanke ene Du er vorden
Du er mit Hjertes foerste Kaerlighed
Jeg elsker dig i Tid og Evighed.*

My only thoughts have become of thee
I love thee as naught else on earth
I love thee throughout time and all eternity.

III

Behind the lake at Sorø, with Ingemann and his
wife, we enter the presbytery,
We hear the joyful voices of children.
Later, we walk through the forest of beech-trees,
to the edge of the lake.
It is now the time of the full moon, and a
nightingale is singing.

IV

An old red-faced carrot with dirt in his hair
Bold and shameless he proposed marriage to a sweet
young carrot.

She was a carrot from good family roots and spotless
complexion.

At the wedding the guests drank morning dew and ate
fallen leaves and pollen.

A large white cabbage blessed the union, and turnips
carried the bridal train.

Beans and potatoes heartily sang, while herbs and
nettles wilted in each other's arms.

The old carrot made a speech:

Too long and lacking in humour.

Munbling, groaning, wheezing on and on.

While the young carrot stared wide-eyed out beyond the
horizon. She was not smiling.

Then there was dancing.

The old carrot removed his boots and jumped about in a
frenzy. Leaping, spinning, sliding,

Then he fell and broke in half and died.

The young carrot sad 'Ah', as her luck had changed.

Now she was free to roam, free to swim in the soup,

Free to be gently nibbled.

She was free, young and still fresh.

V

Der var en Tid

Det var de gode gamle Dage!

I gyldne Sale svandt min Blomstervaar,

Nu skal maskee jeg snart i Vertou bygge;

Nvor Krusemynterne bag Ruden staaer.

Alt dreier Hanen sig paa Petri spiir.

Sog ei jeg døer, jeg bliver

Ja, det er den store Gaade.

There was a time, but the glory days have vanished
In gilded salons my springtime blush was lost
And soon I will be in a home for old folk.
Potted plants, tiny windows
The brittle threads in me will snap.
But if I do not die, I will become...
Yes, I will only know that later on.

VI

*Der Himmel wölbt sich rein und blau
Der Reif stellt Blumen aus zur Schau
Am Fenster prangt ein flimmender Flor
Ein Jüngling steht ihn betrachtend davor.
Und hinter den Blumen blühet noch gar
Ein blaues, ein lächelndes Augenpaar,
Märzveilchen wie jener noch keine geseh'n
Der Reif wird angehaucht, zergeh'n
Eisblumen fangen zu schmelzen an
Und Gott sei gnädig dem jungen Mann.*

The clear blue arching of the sky
Frost pricking blossoms from drops of dew
A shimmering flower on the windowpane
A youth waiting and watching.
Beyond the bloom he sees two smiling eyes
Dark, almost purple, like march violets
As lovely as any he had seen.
His breath will melt the thin layer of frost
The ice flowers will evaporate
Then, merciful Lord, protect him!

VII

*Die Mutter betet herzig, und schaut entzückt auf den
schlummernden Kleinen.
Er ruht in der Wiege so sanft und traut.*

*Ein Engel muss er ihr scheinen.
Sie küsst ihn und herzt ihn sie hält sich kaum.
Vergessen der irdischen Schmerzen, es schweift in der
Zukunft ihr Hoffnungsraum.
So träumen Mütter im Herzen.
Der Rab' indess mit der Sippschaft sein kreischt draussen
am Fenster die Weise:
'Dein Engel wird unser sein,
der Räuber dient uns zur Speise.'*

The mother's prayer is heartfelt,
enraptured as she looks at her sleeping child.
At peace in his cradle, calm and assured,
To her he must seem like an angel.
She kisses and cuddles him, unable to stop.
Fogetting all get earthly troubles,
In hopeful dreams for his future.
All mothers dream this in their hearts.
The ravens, outside at the windows,
are scratching and shrieking:
'Your tiny angel will soon be ours.
We will peck and pull at his tiny entrails, relishing them for
dinner.'

VIII

*Med dæmpede Hvirvler Trommerne gaae,
Ak, skal vi da aldrig til Stedet naae,
At han kan faae Ro i sin Kiste?
Jeg troer mit Hjerte vil briste!
Jeg havde i Verden en eneste Ven,
Ham er det, man bringer til Døden hen,
Med klingende Spil gennem Gaden,
Og jeg er med i Paraden.
For sidste Gang skuer han nu Guds sol,
Der sidder han alt paa Dødens Stol;*

*De binde ham fast til Pælen.
For barm Dig Gud over Sjælen!
Paa eengang sigte reent forbi;
De Otte skyde jo reent forbi;
De rysted' paa Haanden af Smerte,
Kun jeg traf midt i hans Hjerte!*

Our steps keep time with the muffled drum.
How slow it seems, and how long the march.
O, that he was at peace and everything done.
My heart is pounding!
I loved only him, in all the world,
this man who they have condemned to death.
And I am ordered,
to be a part of the firing squad.
Now, for the last time,
he will glimpse the sunlight,
before they bind his eyes.
May a kindly god grant this man eternal peace.
Nine soldiers take aim.
Nine who shudder in horror,
as the bullets are discharged.
But it is I who strike to the centre of his heart.

IX

In a great city, many years ago there lived an emperor
He cared for nothing except the latest fashion in clothes
And he had a different outfit for every hour of the day
and night.

One summer's evening, two cheats arrived in the city
claiming to be weavers and saying that the clothes they
made were not only stylish and elegant,
But possessed a unique quality: that they could only be
seen by clever people.

The emperor ordered six hundred suits immediately
thinking that he could then be certain which of
His subjects could be proved clever, and which were
irredeemably stupid.

The devious weavers demanded huge sums of money
for their labours. They set up two looms and other
machinery, and pretend to spin and weave.
Their looms remained empty, but all who visited - in
order not to seem stupid - acclaimed the spinning and
weaving:

'Such fine design, such fine colours!'

The cheats were delighted,
and asked for yet more money.

The emperor visited the weavers and saw the empty
workshop with nothing on the looms
But he of all people could not appear stupid, so he said
aloud: 'This cloth and this apparel give us great pleasure!
They have our most exulted approbation!'
And the entire court agreed: 'Magnificent, so tasteful and
elegant, beyond compare!'

The weavers were presented with the highest honours
in the land, and the emperor decreed a public ceremony
at which his new clothes would be displayed.

The people gathered. The sun shone. The emperor rose
early and summoned the weavers.

'See, here is the shirt, here the trousers, here the long
cloak, all as light as a spider's web'.

They appeared to hold up each item in turn, but their
hands were empty.

Then they pretended to dress the emperor
in the new clothes.

'How well they fit. How fine they look.
What wondrous ceremonial garments!'

The procession appeared.
There was an unexpected silence.
Then a child cried out:
'He has nothing on! Our emperor is naked!'

X
Rosebud red, so fine of form
Shaped like human lips so warm
You I'll kiss then as your groom
'Tis but to enhance your bloom
Twice to kiss, my lips now yearn
Feel just how my flesh does burn.

'Tis a fact I can't ignore
Noone have I kissed before
Noone here for me will pine
So I'll kiss you, dear rosebud mine
You, alas, know not my grief
You'll shed no tears, only a leaf.

All those people at my grave
Reflect on all the songs I gave
It was him we should have kissed
But if we well meant, their chance was missed
While I yet live they think not to say to me
Kiss me not once, but daily.

XI
Land and sea are both 'vermilion hued' at dusk
Once heard that becomes a commonplace
The sun is neither 'gold' nor 'transcendent'
It always rises in the East and descends in the West.
Stars at night shine cold and lifeless
Too far away for comment.
The blackbird warbling in the tree

No 'gifted musician', but merely following its instinct and
guarding its nest.

The moon is rising, not 'deathly pale'
But a ball of grey rock conforming
to some dull cosmic pattern.
If oceans rage and billows foam
they should learn self-control
And practice good sense and moderation.
And Art?
Surely Art is very clever, but hardly worth a normal
person's bother.

XII
We saw each other
some years had passed.
I thought the eyes made clear those hidden thoughts.
Perhaps I dared not show you.
A smile. A glance. Such happiness.
The moment was so brief.
The warmth and humour in your voice.
Your voice. Your words. Almost a song.
I sing it softly now, and my cheeks begin to glow.

*Danish texts by Hans Christian Andersen. German
translations by Adelbert von Chamisso, English
translations adapted by Michael Finnissy.*

Mimi Doulton

Mimi Doulton is a soprano of British-Pakistani heritage, based in Germany since 2020. A committed performer of contemporary repertoire, she has a particular interest in theatrical work, premiering Oliver Leith's *Last Days* (Royal Opera House Linbury Theatre), Giorgio Battistelli's *Wake* (Birmingham Opera Company), Jasmine Morris' *Animal Farm* (Aldeburgh Festival), and Jasmin Kent Rodgman's *what the dog said to the harvest* (Southbank Centre). In concert, she has performed at venues including Wigmore Hall, the Bamberger Symphoniker, Café Oto, London Contemporary Music Festival, Sommer in Stuttgart, and the Purcell Room, collaborating recently on new works with Neil Luck and Jonathan Higgins. She has held residencies at Fondation Royaumont and Wild Plum Arts, and received funding to tour the Western Balkans in early 2023. Mimi studied at King's College London and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where she studied with Gary Coward and the late Jane Manning.

Read more at mimidoulton.com

Ben Smith

Ben is a London-based pianist and composer specialising in contemporary music. He is interested in—amongst other things—phenomenological and semiotic approaches to musical analysis, and compositional encounters with silence and repetition. Ben was a Junior Fellow at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama from 2020-2022, where he studied with Laurence Crane, Rolf Hind, and James Weeks. As a performer, he has given world and UK premieres by Peter Ablinger (Silk Street Music Hall), Patrícia Sucena de Almeida (Transit: Festival voor nieuwe muziek), Eric Egan (Musicon, Durham University), Michael Finnissy (Michael Finnissy at 70), Anders Hillborg (BBC Total Immersion), Eva-Maria Houben (Borough New Music), Evan Johnson (Café OTO, HCMF), Ragnar Kjartansson (London Contemporary Music Festival), Helmut Lachenmann (BPSE), Rebecca Saunders (Musicon, Durham University), and Alastair White (Tête-à-tête). His recording of Evan Johnson's complete piano music was released on *all that dust* in November 2021.

Read more at bensmithmusic.co.uk

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