

Total performance time: approximately 75 minutes, with no interval

This performance is surtitled

## Love & Endings

[Anna Dennis](#) soprano

[Nicholas Daniel](#) oboe

[Mahan Esfahani](#) harpsichord

### **George Frideric Handel** (1685–1759)

Oboe sonata in C minor, HWV366

(c.1711–1712)

10'

- i. Largo*
- ii. Allegro*
- iii. Adagio*
- iv. Allegro*

### **Elena Langer** (b.1974)

Love & Endings (2022)

14'

- 1. *The Lover in Winter*  
text: anon., 16th century
- 2. *The Life of this World*  
text: anon., Middle English lyric poem
- 3. *Love's Boat*  
text: Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930)  
translated by Maggie Gottlieb

### **Sven-Ingo Koch** (b.1974)

Die Frage nach der Dinglichkeit (2018) 6'

### **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685–1750)

Stumme Seufzer, stille Klagen

(Cantata No.199; 1714)

5'

text: Georg Christian Lehms

Ruhet hie, matte Töne

(Cantata No.210; ?1738–41)

7'

text: anon.

### **Michael Berkeley** (b.1948)

Haiku 2: Insects (2019), world premiere

Britten Pears Arts commission 15'

- 1. *The Fly*
- 2. *The Moth*
- 3. *The Bee*
- 4. *The Spider*
- 5. *The Ladybird*
- 6. *The Maybug (Cockchafer)*

Snake (2012)

5'

### **George Frideric Handel** (1685–1759)

Two songs from Nine German Arias (1727):

texts: Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680–1747)

- 1. *Flammende Rose* 6'
- 2. *Süße Stille, sanfte Quelle* 7'

Elena Langer's *Love & Endings* is a poetic exchange over 'different times, places and traditions'. This whole programme, similarly, is a conversation across history and style, accompanied by that great time-travelling instrument, the harpsichord. The two leading men of the Baroque era rub shoulders with three living composers, and we are treated to a world premiere, inspired – as several of the pieces are – by a brilliant performer.

Handel's **Oboe Sonata** in C minor was composed in around 1712 in a 'Sonata da chiesa' style, a 'slow-fast (fugue)–slow-fast' form originally conceived as being suitable for church performance. The beautiful opening Largo is stately, but has a great underlying melancholy (an arrangement of this movement was used to powerful effect in the devastatingly sad film *Manchester by the Sea* in 2016). The fugue is based around a punchy, chromatic figure, while the third movement is in a calm major key, before the tiny, dance-like final movement – over in a minute.

Sven-Ingo Koch suggests that **Die Frage nach der Dinglichkeit** – a phrase taken from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* – asks a 'question of "thingliness"' (if such a word exists!), or rather it considers the contradiction that all things on earth are both separate entities and part of an evolving process. His piece is structured around a series of momentum-building passages, making explicit the sense of 'becoming' rather than embodying an 'object'. It begins with low, slithering chromatics in the left hand of the harpsichord, followed by increasingly high-lying oboe lines as the tempo gradually speeds up. Slowing down again, the next section contains some atmospheric cluster chords in the keyboard, and a series of complex rhythms and irregular bars that require both instruments to move and breathe as a single unit. The final section revolves around an augmented 4th on the harpsichord, echoed in oboe harmonics above. This interval is worried at and obsessed over – questioning its 'thingliness', perhaps – before dissolving into disparate elements and a final, whispered reiteration at the end.

Bach composed over 200 vocal cantatas, mostly written for services at the various churches where he was employed, but sometimes for secular purposes (such as the 'Coffee Cantata') or for special occasions. BWV 199 is a liturgical work with words by Georg Christian Lehms, which, although it begins in a sombre and self-lacerating way, becomes more joyful and forgiving as the text turns to absolution. The aria **Stumme Seufzer** is from the earlier, more agonized section, though the music is far from agonized, with its exquisite intertwining of oboe and voice, mirroring and chasing each other's lines throughout the aria. BWV 210 was composed several decades later for a wedding sometime in the early 1740s, possibly that of a close friend. The text is as much about music as it is about marriage, with other verses describing flutes and string instruments. **Ruhet hie** is an appropriately 'restful' aria, in a bucolic, rolling 12/8 time signature.

Michael Berkeley's **Haiku 2: Insects** follows *Haiku 1: Birds* (for piano) in creating a series of mood pieces around living creatures. As with *Birds*, the movements in *Insects* do not always represent the sound of the creature (what might a ladbird sound like, for instance?), but are more clearly

inspired by their movement and general sensibility: the darting speed of the fly, the airy trajectory of the moth, the chaotic energy of the maybug. The bee, where sound is so completely tied up with motion, gets a suitably buzzing treatment. The movements are fleeting – Haiku-like – yet concentrated and distilled into evocative 'moments', the harpsichord sonority suiting the swiftness, lightness and distinctiveness of their idiosyncratic flights and brief lives.

Both *Haikus* give respect to the smallest of creatures in the world, even those not especially popular. Berkeley's **Snake** for solo oboe was inspired by the D.H. Lawrence poem in which a man watches a snake drinking from a trough, and is ultimately shamed by his petty, human response to its animal nature. *Snake* gives a suitably sinuous but also very lyrical depiction to this creature, asking five minutes of our time to consider its place in the natural world.

Earthly things are celebrated, in a more spiritual way in Handel's **Nine German Arias** composed 1724–7. They are settings of texts by Barthold Heinrich Brockes, an old friend of Handel's from his student days in Halle, and come from his poetry collection *Earthly Comforts of God*. The 'bewitching splendour' of the 'flaming rose' is treated to an effortlessly charming vocal line and counter-melody; while the 'sweet stillness' manifests in a serene meditation on eternity.

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**Love & Endings** is a set of three songs for soprano, oboe and harpsichord. I wanted to write a small cycle reflecting on big themes (and on bad weather). I chose an anonymous 16th-century poem, another earlier Middle English poem, and an unfinished poem – one of his last – by Vladimir Mayakovsky. These three texts, from different times, places and traditions, felt like a good fit. They talk about the end of love and life, and about the fragility of our existence.

The narrator of the first song longs for an absent lover. The second poem has a strong rhythmic sway; it is like a spooky dance of death, finishing with the sinister ticking of a clock. The last song, with the oboe switched for cor anglais, is a love letter: Mayakovsky wrote it shortly before he shot himself, addressing it to Lily Brik, with whom he had a long and turbulent love affair. The cor anglais reflects each of the soprano's emotions. The ending is calm and serene. I had Anna Dennis' and Nick Daniel's sounds and phrasing in my ears while writing. A few years ago they performed and recorded a longer song-cycle of mine, *Landscape with Three People* (recorded and produced here at Snape Maltings). This is my first time working with Mahan Esfahani; his virtuosic technique and the unique sound of his specially-built harpsichord were a great inspiration. *Love & Endings* was commissioned by Tom Southern, in memory of Gordon Crosse, 1937–2021.

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