

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

BARBER  
CONCERTS

BARBER  
CONCERTS 75  
— 1945-2020 —

# The Hermes Experiment

Anne Denholm harp

Oliver Pashley clarinet

Marianne Schofield double bass

Héloïse Werner soprano



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# Programme

**Tanka**

Josephine Stephenson  
(b.1990)

**Liebst du um Schönheit**

Clara Schumann  
(1819 - 1896)  
(arr. Pashley)

**Fruit Songs**

Kerry Andrew  
(b.1978)  
(arr. Denholm)

**Movement II. Verisimilitude, Daily Rituals**

Matthew Grouse  
(b.1996)

**DMe**

Mira Calix  
(b.1970)

**Uh huh, yeah**

Oliver Leith  
(b.1990)

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# Programme Notes

## Tanka

Josephine Stephenson

*Tanka* (literally “short poem”) is a form of Japanese poetry - similar to the more famous Haiku - made of five lines. Ben Osborn’s poem is a response to a photograph by Thurstan Redding, commissioned by The Hermes Experiment for their 2015 *Lovescapes* concert. The photograph shows two lovers embracing against an industrial backdrop; the text describes the interaction of light and the shadows it creates throughout the day. The music reflects my interpretation of both Thurstan's photo and Ben's poem. It is slow, dreamlike and mysterious and also somewhat bittersweet: a sound world inspired by the stark contrast between two opposed images made strangely yet beautifully at one within the photograph. I had fun playing around with Ben's words, realising that they could be effectively interchanged. There is no narrative as such; instead the piece strives to be - like the photograph - a fixed moment in time, which expands as the words become confused.

## Liebst du um Schönheit

Clara Schumann

Clara Schumann’s delicate setting of Friedrich Rückert’s poem *Liebst du um Schönheit* (if you love for beauty) is an iconic embodiment of the 19th-century German art song. With a central theme of love, the singer describes to a partner the various reasons people ‘love’ - for beauty, youth, and money - each time decrying their inauthenticity. The only love the protagonist is interested in is love for love’s sake, sung passionately in the final verse.

In this arrangement the earlier verses are manipulated and elongated slightly to reflect the uneasiness and fragility of a relationship founded upon less than admirable intentions, before opening up in the final verse, where the singer finally declares her love for love’s sake: the only love worth pursuing.

## Fruit Songs

Kerry Andrew

- i. Plum
- ii. Blackberry
- iii. Cherry
- iv. Apple

I intended to write a set of 1-2 min. miniatures that were sultry, ambiguously exotic and quirky in character. And about fruit! Particular musical influences for these songs include Björk, Meredith Monk, Sheila Chandra, English folk, Japanese, West African and Indian music. – Kerry Andrew

Kerry’s *Fruit Songs* were originally written for soprano with guitar accompaniment but she has also composed versions accompanied by piano and chamber group. My arrangement takes inspiration from all three versions and uses varying combinations of The Hermes Experiment’s forces. ‘Plum’ (text by William Carlos Williams) is a simple song with a refrain of ‘forgive me’, as the protagonist has eaten some promised fruit. ‘Blackberry’ (text by George Bowering) is based on an 11-note row with 1 quaver pitch per syllable which is gradually deconstructed. ‘Cherry’ is the most theatrical of the songs and explores many extra-vocal techniques. The text is by Yasuhara Teishitsu, translated by Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite. Finally, ‘Apple’ is a magical, ethereal and folk-inspired song, setting part of a poem by John Drinkwater about apples glowing in the moonlight. – Anne Denholm

## Movement II. Verisimilitude, Daily Rituals

Matthew Grouse

I started writing *Daily Rituals* at a time when I was regularly thinking about the proportion of my everyday life made up of relatively mundane, recurrent physical or social behaviours that often feel entirely automatic. As well as my own routine, the piece draws on the routines and rituals of friends and colleagues; the impact that

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certain behavioural reflexes can have on conversational sincerity; and comparisons between the repetition involved in instrumental / vocal praxis and the ordinary happenings that occur at work, on transport or when we procrastinate.

**DMe**

Mira Calix

Conversations with strangers through social media is something I and so many of us, have a lot of/ How those relationships develop, with their own unique patterns, short hands and rhythms seemed ripe for musical exploration to me. *DMe* is primarily graphic score, divided into red and black lines, of varying lengths and widths, transcribed directly from this formative conversation. The Musicians represent both parties, dressed in the corresponding colours, it's a work of what I call devised improvisation, with moments that refer directly to noted music and lyrics, which have been assigned to the now anonymised banter. The work was created for and with the Hermes Experiment, they have transformed what was originally a duet into a quartet. The concert hall, our social network.

**Uh huh, yeah**

Oliver Leith

To me, *Uh huh, yeah* is an expression of something confusing - between joy and sadness. I imagine the musicians as an animatronic band, like in a USA Chuck E Cheese restaurant (I have never been to one) where these strange robot bears, mice and ducks perform the same music over and over again. This band is running out of batteries.

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# Texts

## Tanka

Josephine Stephenson

Poem by Ben Osborn (2015): *after reading yosano akiko & thinking about becoming you*

there are moments when  
shadows bridge the distance  
between distinct forms;  
the light increases  
before watching itself disappear

There are moments when shadows bridge the distance between distinct forms  
the light increases before watching itself disappear  
mm th[e] Ah mmo-men-ts w[e]n shadows fo m-z la[i]t fo m  
there are shadows between the light watching the distance bridge distinct moments the light between shadows  
the moments disappear when distance forms the bridge before itself  
the light before the distance increases before shadows moments  
between forms when bridge shadows before

## Liebst du um Schönheit

Clara Schumann

Text by Friedrich Rückert

English Translation by Richard Stokes, author of *The Book of Lieder* (Faber, 2005)

Liebst du um Schönheit,  
O nicht mich liebe!  
Liebe die Sonne,  
Sie trägt ein gold'nes Haar!

If you love for beauty,  
O love not me!  
Love the sun,  
She has golden hair!

Liebst du um Jugend,  
O nicht mich liebe!  
Liebe den Frühling,  
Der jung ist jedes Jahr!

If you love for youth,  
O love not me!  
Love the spring  
Who is young each year!

Liebst du um Schätze,  
O nicht mich liebe!  
Liebe die Meerfrau,  
Sie hat viel Perlen klar!

If you love for riches,  
O love not me!  
Love the mermaid  
Who has many shining pearls!

Liebst du um Liebe,  
O ja, mich liebe!  
Liebe mich immer,  
Dich lieb' ich immerdar!

If you love for love,  
Oh yes, love me!  
Love me always;  
I shall love you forever!

## Fruit Songs

Kerry Andrew

i. Plum

excerpts taken from text by William Carlos Williams

Forgive me  
I have eaten the plums  
Forgive me  
that were in the ice box  
Forgive me  
And that which you were probably saving from breakfast

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Forgive me  
They were delicious  
So sweet and so cold

ii. Blackberry  
excerpt taken from text by George Bowering

I went to blackberries on the vine they were

iii. Cherry  
excerpts taken from text by Yasuhara Teishitsu, translated by Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite

Yoshino...o,o,o  
Is all I can say for the cherries that grow on Mount Yoshino

iv. Apple  
excerpts taken from 'Moonlit Apples' by John Drinkwater

The skylight lets the moonlight in, and those  
apples are deep-sea apples of green.

The moon again  
Dapples the apples with deep-sea light.

They gather the silver streams  
Out of the moon, those moonlit apples of dreams,

They keep  
Tryst with the moon, and deep is the..., deep  
On moon-washed apples of wonder.

## **Movement II. Verisimilitude, Daily Rituals**

Matthew Grouse

Oh hey, fancy bumping into you  
Yea, fine. How are you g[...]  
No, don't be silly. I was just g[...] Excuse me  
I was just asking how you're getting on  
Oh wow! That's brilliant. How's it going so far?  
Right, ye[...] Well that still sounds like really exciting  
I hate to do this but I'm actually in quite a big rush, but it's honestly been so nice to s[...]  
Right, oh, yep, y[...], we'll have to[...] You too. Bye

Hello? Yes, can I ask who's speaking please?  
Right, I don't mean to be rude or... okay, sorry, go on  
No, I know, it's just I don't ac[...] I don't actually have a car,  
so that's why I [...] Yes, I'm just saying it's probably quite unlikely, y'know that that was me  
Right, yes ha[...] Sorry, I'm gonna have to go, y[...] sorry. Goodbye

Hey! Yea, I'm really good, yea. What about you?  
Ha ha ha ha ha. Yea, I know. Bits really \* bleh bleh \* I can't speak, sorry  
It's really weird to be like meeting in person  
No, yea, I know, me too, this is actually the first time

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Yea, n[...] not really ha ha ha  
Why did you actually like start, y'know using it then?  
Uh yea, that makes sense. I think I was actually quite similar. I mean I barely [...]  
Sorry, I don't really use it either, just sometimes when I'm really bored or something..  
Not that I was ha [...]  
Yea, no obviously I wasn't bored when we were cha[...] ha ha ha  
Aw thank you, you too.

Hiya! Yea, fine thanks, what about you?  
Nice. That's cool. Um, so what did you think of that?  
Uh huh  
Ah, that's interesting  
That's what I was thinking ha ha ha  
Yea, I feel quite similarly actually  
I think I need to hear it again to properly make my mi[...]  
Yea, exactly. I maybe just found it a little bit, I don't know, self important or something  
and that middle bit went on for way too long.

Oh yea, I'm fine thanks  
Not so bad thanks, yea, fine  
I'm alright. Things are good, yea  
Ummmm, yea, I'm fine  
Haha, yea, no I'm all good... yep, honestly  
Yea, can't complain.... I'm fine, yea... good thanks... I'm alright, yea... fine, fine, just fine.

\*Begins a self-flagellatory, existential rant that becomes less and less intelligible\*

**Uh huh, yeah**

Oliver Leith

uh huh, yeah

Texts supplied courtesy of The Hermes Experiment.

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# Biography

Winners of the Royal Over-Seas League Mixed Ensemble Competition 2019, Tunnell Trust Awards 2017, Nonclassical's Battle of the Bands 2014, Making Music Selected Artists 2019/20 and Park Lane Group Young Artists 2015/16, The Hermes Experiment is a contemporary quartet made up of harp, clarinet, voice and double bass. Capitalising on their deliberately idiosyncratic combination of instruments, the ensemble regularly commissions new works, as well as creating their own innovative arrangements and venturing into live free improvisation. The ensemble has commissioned over 50 composers at various stages of their careers. They were shortlisted in the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards 2019 in the Young Artists Category and their debut album HERE WE ARE is out now on Delphian Records.

Recent highlights include performances at Wigmore Hall, BBC Radio 3 Open Ear at LSO St Luke's, Tallinn Music Week, St Petersburg's Sound Ways Festival, Southbank Centre, Kings Place and Spitalfields Festival. The Hermes Experiment were one of the showcase artists at the Classical NEXT Conference 2019. In January 2019, they celebrated their fifth birthday with a concert supported by Arts Council England and RVW Trust, and recorded for BBC Radio 3.

The ensemble is dedicated to the value of contemporary music in education and community contexts. They are ensemble in residence for the Young Music Makers of Dyfed 2018-19, and as part of their fifth birthday project they recently ran composition workshops in state schools in and around London. In 2017-18, they worked with composition students from both The Royal Academy of Music and Trinity Laban. They are running similar projects in 2018-19 at both institutions. In 2014-15, they took part in Wigmore Hall Learning's schemes.

The ensemble also strives to create a platform for cross-disciplinary collaboration. In June 2015, they created a 'musical exhibition' with photographer Thurstan Redding, and in September 2016 during an Aldeburgh Music Residency, they developed a new interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. They also worked with poet Ali Lewis in 2016 & 2019, devising new pieces with him.

The quartet has received funding from Arts Council England, Aldeburgh Music, the RVW Trust, Hinrichsen Foundation, Britten-Pears Foundation, Future of Russia Foundation, Oleg Prokofiev Trust, Nicholas Boas Charitable Trust, PRS for Music Foundation and Help Musicians UK.

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