

GLASGOW CATHEDRAL FESTIVAL

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Thursday 28 September 2023, 21:00
event 3

Twilight in the Crypt

Stephanie Lamprea soprano
Alistair MacDonald electronics



Robert Laidlow *Post-Singularity Songs* (2023) *first performance*

- I. Creation Myth Part 1: In The Beginning
- II. Creation Myth Part 1: The Kingdom of Dust and Decay
- III. Love
- IV. Creation Myth Part 3: Pyron's Return
- V. Gift
- VI. Storyteller Unpearls

When we hear a creation myth, what is it that we are listening to? These stories contain truth, but not usually a factual or historical truth. Instead, they tell us what the society that wrote them values, what it wants to pass on, and what defines them. I wondered what a creation myth from a world composed of intelligent machines or post-biological humans might look like. Where might they think they came from, and what would they think the essence of the world was? What stories would they choose to tell?

Post-Singularity Songs is a set of artefacts and stories from this world. At its heart is a creation myth, which tells of how the world began, what reality is made of, and how the beings inside it came to be conscious. There is Pyron, the archetypal explorer, and the King of the World of Dust and Decay—that is, our own world. There is also a storyteller; the entity that is relaying this myth. They are important too, and have hints of their own story which is entangled with the wider cosmogony.

Much of the text is derived from conversations with the worldbuilding AI and from a specially created poetry-generating AI called GPT-Pyron. I noticed that both of these algorithms returned to certain ideas continually, such as the sun, dust, death, time, and free will. These are developed further through poetry by Emily Dickinson, John Donne and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, which I added to the text.

Lisa Robertson *to almost nothing: an unnatural silence in the air* (2023)

GCF co-commission, first performance

- I. Capercaillie, Hen-Harrier. Red list - threatened with UK extinction
- II. Kittiwake, Leach's Storm Petrel. Red list - threatened with global extinction
- III. The Great Auk. Extinct.

What does extinction sound like? A final screech in the hands of hunters? A recorded sound trapped, stationary, a museum piece in fixed form, its maker denied all avenues of evolution? A gap in the soundscape? An unnatural silence in the air?

This piece's text includes quotations from naturalists Thomas Pennant, James Orton, and the HMS Boston's Aaron Thomas, as well as from one of the men who killed the last Great Auk; the imagined thoughts of the St Kildan hunters who captured and killed the last Great Auk in the UK; and references in Scottish folklore relating to bird species.

Katrin Klose *The wall* (2022)

first performance

The wall is based on a text by German visual artist and writer Marie Samrotzki and is linked to a performance of literally pushing a wall. This work explores systems and boundaries of our very existence. It engages in existential human feelings like solitude, depression and hope describing the state of 'pushing against something which is never ending, futile'. Within the piece, I explored our very own 'motor for moving' and our reactions to crisis.

I composed fixed media using different samples of the spoken text and sounds of breathing, repeated consonants, sustained pitches and page-turning. The live layer consists of voice processed by a Roland Voice Transformer 3, stuttering, shouting, and tonal material derived from Edvard Grieg's *Åse's Death*.

Alistair MacDonald *AD 1136* (2022)

GCF co-commission, first performance

In 1136, work began on the building of Glasgow Cathedral. In the same year, Hildegard von Bingen was elected to lead her convent in South West Germany. Hildegard is one of the best-known composers of her era (I discovered her music many years ago in Emma Kirkby's fabulous recording *A feather on the breath of God*), but music was only a part of her amazing life. She was a 'visionary, mystic, healer, linguist, poet, artist, musician, playwright, biographer, theologian, preacher and spiritual counsellor' (Priscilla Throop) and has been described as the founder of scientific natural history in Germany.

In this piece, a soundscape forged from the sound of Glasgow Cathedral's great bell is interwoven with Hildegard's writings on gemstones and healing, a letter to a Benedictine monk, her visions, and two of her antiphons, in a series of kaleidoscopic, multi-channel illusions.

BIOGRAPHIES

Stephanie Lamprea is an architect of new sounds and expressions as a performer, recitalist, curator, and improviser, specialising in contemporary classical repertoire. Trained as an operatic coloratura, she uses her voice as a mechanism of avant-garde performance art, creating 'maniacal shifts of vocal production and character... like an icepick through the skull' (Jason Eckardt). She has been praised by *Opera News* for 'her iconoclasm and fearless commitment to new sounds' and for her 'impressive display of extended vocal techniques, in the tradition of such artists as Bethany Beardslee, Cathy Berberian and Joan La Barbara.'

Alistair MacDonald is a composer, performer and sound artist. He has been designing his own computer-based sound processing instruments/environments for more than 20 years, to create uniquely rich, spatialised music and sound. Often collaborative, his work encompasses composing, field recording, live electronics, interactivity and improvisation. He makes standalone electroacoustic works, music for instruments and voices, music and sound design for dance, film and installation. He is Professor and director of the Electroacoustic Studios at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

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