

## Manchester Collective: LAD Programme Notes

### Setlist

|                      |                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Hildegard von Bingen | O virtus Sapientie               |
| Trad. (Bulgaria)     | Kopanitsa*                       |
| Trad. (Bulgaria)     | Buchimish*                       |
| Shunya               | Shattered Creek                  |
| J.S. Bach            | Violin Partita No. 2, 'Chaconne' |
| Steve Reich          | Electric Counterpoint, III. Fast |
| Trad. (Denmark)      | Despair Not, O Heart*            |
| Shunya               | Goodbye Spring                   |
| Julia Wolfe          | LAD*                             |

\*arranged by Rakhi Singh

Approximate run time: 75”

### Line-up

Rakhi Singh – Violin, Shruti box

Alan Keary – Bass guitar, electric guitar, violin, electronics, vocals

### Introduction

LAD contains multitudes, and depths. On a basic level, it's the name of a 2007 composition by Julia Wolfe that forms a pillar of Rakhi Singh and Alan Keary's duo set. Dig a little deeper though, and LAD becomes a space for sharing, where two artists with different backgrounds but similar influences absorb each other's idiosyncrasies.

The best way to understand the form of violinist Rakhi Singh and multi-instrumentalist Alan Keary's LAD programme is like a folk music session, where bits of music are arranged in collage-like sets to create something greater than a sum of their parts. Though folk music inspires the structure, the overall shape is more eclectic, yet no less shrewdly chosen. "It's like, how do you balance a tasting menu," Rakhi asks; here, the menu stretches from Alan's Shunya project of today all the way back to 12th century composer Hildegard von Bingen, and takes in Bach, Steve Reich, and Bulgarian folk music.

This programme is an exercise in balance-finding: between electronic production and acoustic clarity, between a plethora of genres, styles, contexts and purposes, and between each artist's personality, as Alan and Rakhi both bring original compositions to the table. The result is something that's fluid but contained, like watching a river flow from source to mouth.

## **FEATURED WORKS**

### **Julia Wolfe ‘LAD’**

Arranged by Rakhi Singh  
Violin & effects pedals, 2007

Julia Wolfe deserves to be better known on this side of the Atlantic. The Pulitzer-winning composer wrote this bagpipe piece in 2007: it's wrought and heavy, like the sound of ancient trees being dragged out of the ground against their will. (Originally for nine bagpipes, it's rearranged by Rakhi for violins, with effects pedals for some added crunch.)

There are endless ways to focus a composition in the 21st century, by prioritising repetition, notational complexity, theatrical spectacle, chance, improvisation, or something else entirely. But 'LAD' is a particularly good example of prioritising tone colour over everything else, encasing the piece in constant drones to focus the senses elsewhere. Interrogating a single tone colour for an entire piece, Wolfe asks, "What exactly does this particular sound sound like at its essence, and how far can I stretch that?"

But the moment Wolfe's steely focus settles, she moves on to another technique. The Shepard tone is the musical equivalent of one of those swirling red and white poles you see outside traditional barbers; a series of parts slide from bottom to top in succession, giving the impression of constant movement when in fact the bigger structure stays completely still. Breaking out of dense fog of drones and tones are a few folk tunes; some lamenting, some jig-like, but none derailing Wolfe's determined interrogation of raw sound.

### **Hildegard von Bingen ‘O virtus Sapientie’**

Violin, Shruti box, bass guitar & electronics, 12th century

The composer, writer, philosopher, mystic, visionary and abbess Hildegard von Bingen lived in the Rhineland of Germany from 1098 to 1179. Fundamentally shaped by the regular visions she experienced from an early age, and one of the most enduring characters in her resulting visionary writings, was the female form of Sapientia – a representation of the Divine Wisdom that existed in the space between Creator and creature. This chant proclaims the strength and all-encompassing power of such wisdom, in the heights, on earth, and everywhere else. It's heady stuff, all over in a matter of minutes.

### **J. S. Bach ‘Violin Partita No. 2, Chaconne’**

Violin, 1717–1720

Long ago, a "partita" simply meant a set of dances, though by the time Bach's second partita was written in the 1710s, a singular understanding of the word had long departed. Yet this virtuosically expansive take on the form still retains something of the dance quality. Rather than a courtly dance in strict hold, it's more like a contemporary solo piece, where

movement is much more expansive and volatile. And, sure enough, the piece has a strong history in the dance world: footage exists online of the famed Mexican dancer José Limón performing his own choreography of this 'Chaconne' in 1948.

Bach's 'Chaconne' is a titan of the violin repertoire and contains a bit of everything within its spinning structure of elaborate variations: soul, passion, good-natured liveliness, restraint, anger. As Johannes Brahms put it in a letter to Clara Schumann, "on one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings."

### **Steve Reich 'Electric Counterpoint, III. Fast'**

Electric guitar & tape, 1987

The final movement of Reich's minimalist classic 'Electric Counterpoint' for live electric guitar and pre-recorded multitracked guitar parts is four-and-a-half minutes in the shape of the eye of a needle. It starts with a single thin idea, begins to bulge as more parts join, splits into definite upper and lower parts, and joins to reform a smooth thin line that quickly tapers to a resolution. "Repetitive, pulse-driven figures have remained a characteristic, but so have the slips and leaps of a lively mind" says Paul Griffiths in an introduction to the composer. Listen out for those slips, where the pulse hops and your perception of what's important in the texture shifts entirely.

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