

# KINGS PLACE



## Riot Ensemble

### Solstices

**Fri 11 Jun**

Hall One | 8pm

#### Riot Ensemble

**Aaron Holloway-Nahum** artistic director

**Pasha Mansurov** flute

**Tom Lessels** bass clarinet

**Huw White** trombone

**David Ibanez** violin

**Stephen Upshaw** viola

**Louise McMonagle** cello

**Marianne Schofield** double bass

**Sam Cave** guitar

**Claudia Racovicean** piano

**Sam Wilson** percussion

## Programme

**George Friedrich Haas (b. 1953)**

*Solstices* (2018) for ten instruments in total darkness

**Please note that there will be  
NO LATE ADMISSION.**

Once audience members are seated, this performance, of roughly 70+ minutes, will take place in darkness. There will be sufficient extra staff to ensure audience needs are met, and safe evacuation in case of fire. Lights will be on for the audience coming in and out of the hall.

In spite of its resonances with the rituals of ancient and modern cultures around the world, the title of Georg Friedrich Haas's *Solstices* (commissioned by the Riot Ensemble) has a much more private meaning. 'It is a personal and beautiful coincidence', he has said. 'I met my beloved spouse Mollena on 21 December 2013. And we decided to perform a ceremony to sanctify our relationship on 21 June 2014.' On one level, therefore, *Solstices* is a love song.

But it is also a piece about intimacy and connection more widely. Apart from its beginning, when the lights fade down and its end, when they come back up again, the whole 70-minute piece is played in complete darkness: darkness so absolute you cannot see your hand in front of your face: no stage lights, no music stand lamps, not even exit signs (and especially no mobile phones!). For the performers the challenge is unique. Their music must be memorised, of course; but they must also depend entirely on their ears to know when to play and when to stop. The living, instinctive bonds they have with each other are paramount. Haas has written several works with passages in complete darkness (although few on this scale), but the music of *Solstices* is superhumanly complex, a triumph of compositional invention, virtuoso performance, and physical and mental endurance. Yet it is also one of his most delicate works: in between passages of group harmonisation (led by the piano) are many unexpected moments of pure chamber music. Written two years before the COVID-19 pandemic, *Solstices* is nevertheless an urgent and unforgettable hymn to the necessity of human contact.

*Tim Rutherford-Johnson, 2020*



## Georg Friedrich Haas

**Georg Friedrich Haas** (b. 1953 in Graz, Austria) has taught at the University of the Arts in Graz (lastly as associate professor) and at the Music Academy in Basel. In 2013 he was appointed professor of music at Columbia University in New York and since then has taught composition there. Haas feels both rooted in the European tradition and strongly influenced by the aesthetic freedom of American composers like Charles Ives, Harry Partch, John Cage and James Tenney. He also has repeatedly made reference to the musical mysticism of the composers Giacinto Scelsi and Ivan Wyschnegradsky.

In a survey published in the January 2017 issue of the Italian music periodical *Classic Voice*, 100 named experts were asked to choose 'the most beautiful music composed since 2000'. By a wide margin, they awarded first place to Haas. His wide-ranging output, including numerous works for large orchestra, for chamber orchestra, instrumental concertos, eight operas, ten string quartets, a variety of other chamber music and vocal works etc., is constantly finding new audiences worldwide – and not only at special new music events; his compositions are also reaching a traditionally schooled public. Haas has devoted his work to the utopian ideal (not 100% attainable) of creating a new music that is both expressive and mellifluous – not despite but because of the fact that it is new.

## Aaron Holloway-Nahum

American composer **Dr Aaron Holloway-Nahum** (b. 1983) has firmly established himself as a pillar of the UK's contemporary music scene. While his compositional career is formidable on its own – commissions include the London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and Third Coast Percussion – his most meaningful work combines his compositional knowledge with a variety of additional skills, through which he leads an award-winning career as a recording engineer, conductor, and arts entrepreneur. Most prominently in this regard, Aaron serves as the conductor, founder, and



Artistic Director of the Riot Ensemble, an organization that has raised more than £500k towards the performance of contemporary music and premiered over 250 original works.

Aaron's music has been performed in over one dozen countries across four continents, and is characterized by its detailed and ornate timbres, bold melodic unisons, and experimental narrative structures. Upcoming premieres include works for chamber orchestra Ensemble Echapée, the renowned Keuris Quartet and an Opera – Aaron's first – based on the true story of Donald Crowhurst. Selected as one of just two composers for the Peter Eötvös Foundation inaugural mentorship class, he has held a variety of fellowships over the past decade, including Tanglewood, Bang on a Can, Aspen, Cheltenham, a Copland House Residency, and many more. Notable past performances of his music include the Pannon Philharmonic Orchestra (Hungary), Plural Ensemble (Madrid), and a full length film score recorded at Abbey Film Road.

The long hours in studio at Abbey Road sparked a fervent interest—and secondary career—in audio recording and production for Aaron. (He remarked once in an interview that 'the way you listen as a recording engineer improves your conducting and your composing.') As the managing director and engineer for Coviello Music Productions, Aaron produces as many as 20 albums per year of Europe and the US' premier ensembles; his clientele includes the Ensemble Intercontemporain, Arditti Quartet, Sandbox Percussion, and Adam Swayne, whose solo album of American Piano music, *Speak to Me*, was nominated in two categories for the prestigious Opus Klassik Awards in Germany.

Narrowing the gap of gender, racial, and socioeconomic inequality within new music is of paramount importance to Aaron; his most effective work in this regard has been through his work in leading Riot Ensemble, an organisation that has received numerous accolades since its founding in 2012: *I Care If You Listen* deemed Riot 'an ensemble with vision and artistry', while *The New Yorker's* Alex Ross celebrated its most recent album as 'one of



2019's best recordings.' As Riot Ensemble's chief curator and conductor, Aaron has showcased contemporary work from a variety of composers, including Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, Ann Cleare, Kit Downes, Daniel Kidane, Liza Lim, Alexander Hawkins, Clara Iannotta, Lisa Streich and a new work, *Solstices*, by Georg Friedrich Haas performed in total darkness, for which Aaron learned to (re-)tune a piano. He is now also the technical director of Ensemble Nikel, for whom he facilitates performances and live-recordings in addition to strategic marketing and logistics work.

Aaron is based in London, where he lives with his wife, the pianist Claudia Maria Racovicean, and their son, Ezra.

## Riot Ensemble

**Riot Ensemble** connects people to great contemporary music in concerts and events that are just as innovative, vibrant and rewarding as the music itself. The members of Riot are some of the top European soloists in new music, and with Riot they work as performers, curators, commissioners, and collaborators, creating and producing a diverse array of projects.

Based in London, Riot is particularly active in bringing emerging international voices to the British new-music scene and since 2012 has given over 200 World and UK premieres by composers from more than 30 countries. Their annual call for scores received 436 submissions in 2020, and in the past six years has resulted in almost 20 commissions. Additionally, they enjoy close working relationships with some of the most important composers of our time, including

Clara Iannotta, Chaya Czernowin, Ann Cleare, and Georg Friedrich Haas whose evening length piece *Solstices* was commissioned by Riot in 2019. In 2020 the ensemble was awarded the prestigious Ernst von Siemens Ensemble Prize.

Riot recently made their Wigmore Hall debut and perform regularly at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK) as well as Dark Music Days (Iceland), Tampere Biennale (Finland), Nordic Music Days (Sweden), and November Music (Netherlands) with upcoming appearances scheduled at Darmstadt (Germany), Wien Modern (Austria), ENSEMS (Spain), Arctic Arts (Norway) and Tzllil Meudcan (Israel).

In 2020, the ensemble began a new partnership with Kings Place where they present their *ReNEW* series, focusing on bringing the most cutting edge international new music to London.

Their recent release on Huddersfield Contemporary Records, *Speak Be Silent*, was named one of the ten most important recordings of the year by Alex Ross in the *New Yorker*, and has been praised as 'one of the best recordings of 2019' by *Sequenza 21* and 'a most impressive release' by Australia's *Limelight* magazine. They have also recently released a disc featuring Jonathan Harvey's *Song Offerings*, recorded at Deutschlandfunk in Köln and are currently working on a new release of Patricia Alessandrini's chamber music for HCR. Riot features regularly on BBC R3 and enjoys radio broadcasts across Europe.

Their work has been generously supported by Opus 2 International and Arts Council England lottery grants, alongside numerous private sponsors, PRSF, Diaphonique, the Ambache Charitable Trust, the RVW Trust, and the Holst Foundation.

