

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

The Rite of Spring in the Gashouder, with Abel Selaocoe

Friday, April 16, 2027 · 20:30 · Gashouder

Gemma New, conductor · Abel Selaocoe, cello and voice

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	SELAOCOE b. 1992 <i>Four Spirits, concerto for cello, voice, percussion and orchestra</i>	
2	STRAVINSKY 1882–1971 <i>The Rite of Spring (Le Sacre du printemps)</i>	33'
TOTAL MUSIC		33'

Abel Selaocoe

b. 1992

Four Spirits, concerto for cello, voice, percussion and orchestra

ABOUT THE WORK

‘Four Spirits’ is Abel Selaocoe’s first cello concerto, and he is its soloist in more than the usual sense: he plays, sings, tells stories and leads. It was commissioned jointly by the BBC Scot-

tish Symphony Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony and the Dutch orchestra Philharmonie Zuidnederland, and was first performed, according to his record label, in 2022. It is scored for cello, voice, percussion and orchestra, and has four movements that run into one another.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen first for the range of sounds one performer produces. Selaocoe's voice can drop to a low growl beneath the cello line and then leap to light, fluttering high notes, and he often sings and bows at the same time, so that it can be hard to tell where the instrument stops and the voice begins.

In 'Bana' the cello turns playful and scampers high on the fingerboard, with sliding harmonics and skittish plucked notes. 'Tshepo' begins with rapid figures across the strings that recall Baroque cello writing, before percussion and voice pull the music somewhere else entirely. Throughout, the drumming gives the groove that the orchestra then picks up and colours.

The last movement is about singing together, and Selaocoe means it literally. In earlier performances he has taught the audience a phrase before starting and brought everyone in during the finale, so be ready to join in.

Igor Stravinsky

1882–1971

The Rite of Spring (Le Sacre du printemps)

33 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The idea, as Igor Stravinsky later told it, came to him as a sudden picture: a pagan rite in which elders sit in a circle and watch a young girl dance herself to death as a sacrifice to the god of spring. He worked it out with the painter Nicholas Roerich, an expert on ancient Russia who also designed the production, and Sergei Diaghilev took it on for his Ballets Russes. The score, subtitled ‘Pictures of Pagan Russia in Two Parts’, occupied Stravinsky for about two years.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The piece begins with a single bassoon, alone and very high in its register, playing a tune Stravinsky took from a collection of Lithuanian folk songs. Other woodwinds join one by one until the texture teems like something growing. Then comes the passage everyone remembers, the ‘Augurs of Spring’: the strings hammer out one dense chord over and over in even notes while eight horns punch in accents at unpredictable moments.

Part One, 'The Adoration of the Earth', is a series of games and processions that pile up in speed and weight. Listen for the slow, heavy tread of the 'Spring Rounds', the entrance of the sage, a sudden hush as he kisses the earth, and the 'Dance of the Earth', which ends the first part by simply being cut off at full tilt.

Part Two, 'The Sacrifice', opens in near darkness, with quiet, shifting chords and muted trumpets. The young women dance in circles and one of them is chosen: eleven pounding beats from strings and drums mark the moment. The final 'Sacrificial Dance' is the hardest thing in the score to play, since almost every bar has a different length and the whole orchestra must jolt forward together. It ends with a brief upward flick in the flutes and a last, brutal chord. In the round space of the Gashouder, with the audience close to the players, the physical impact should be considerable.

Tonight's artists

Abel Selaocoe *cello and voice*

Abel Selaocoe is composer and soloist at once in 'Four Spirits', playing the cello, singing and leading the audience, and the orchestra presents him in the Gashouder, the round former gas holder in Amsterdam's Westerpark, which it describes as newly renovated. Seats and standing places are both on offer and none are assigned. The evening, a single performance, ends with 'The Rite of Spring' under Gemma New.

Abel Selaocoe is a South African cellist, singer and composer, born in 1992 in Sebokeng. He began the cello as a child in South Africa and later moved to Manchester to study at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he completed his International Artist Diploma in 2018. In performance he combines classical cello playing with improvisation, body percussion and singing that draws on South African traditions, including overtone singing. He is an artistic partner of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

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